ALASNAM'S LADY.

A MODERN ROMANCE.

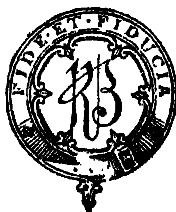
BY

LESLIE KEITH,

AUTHOR OF "SURRENDER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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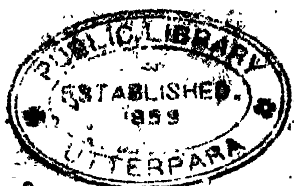
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"Prince Zeyn Alasnam in the days of old,
Led by a dream, unearthed a secret stair,
And, this descending, reached a vault, and there—
So runs the tale Scheherazade told—
He found great store of precious stones and gold,
And eight pure diamond statues, passing fair:
Yet was it shown him that a ninth, more rare,
After long patient search he should behold.
'What is more precious than the diamond bright,
And what more pure than is its liquid light?'
Ponders the prince, as weary and sore tried,
Homeward he hastes to seek his hard-won prize.
He gains the vault wherein the treasure lies;
He turns the key,—and clasps his beauteous bride!"

A. Cockburn.



ALASNAM'S LADY.

CHAPTER I.

" A man that fortune's buffets and rewards,
Hast ta'en with equal thanks."

" So, as I told you, they are coming," he said again, after he had said other things.

They were standing on the balcony that projected from an upper window in a crowded street. In idle Spain one spends a great deal of time on the balcony. He leaned negligently against the window-frame; she—with hands clasping the iron bar of the railing—was looking down with grave eyes on the fluctuating crowd that crossed and recrossed the sun-flooded Puerta del Sol. There was a great life and movement there; the mingled murmur and hum of the city's voice rose urgently on the still, hot air. The sky above them was a deep, blinding blue, serene and unchanging; the

great basin in the centre of the wide square where the water-carriers were busy, brimmed over; the splash of the falling silver, heard and then lost again, had coolness in the very sound of it.

"Is he like you?" she asked by-and-by.

He was a little time in answering, staring absently at a spot of vivid colour made by the loose crimson girdle of a passing *Aguador*, and she turned to look at him.

"I was considering whether there was any possible point where we came within speaking distance of each other," he said, smiling at her; "but I think not. He's a spoilt boy; he takes tremendous liberties. That means that I am much wiser, you know."

"Oh, of course!"

"Once, for a marvel, our fancy ran in the same direction, but not for long. No,"—he gave his head a little backward toss—"we are not alike; he is one of the fellows who are born lucky."

"What was the fancy that you shared? Tell me, Ralph."

She spoke softly and yet eagerly. To any one listening it would have been readily apparent that this young girl was accustomed to have her questions answered.

"We imagined ourselves to be in [illegible] with

the same woman." The light in his eyes was almost ironical, yet he was smiling at her. "Chester was in love with himself, I dare say; as for me, I found consolation not so impossible."

"Do you know, Ralph," she said gravely, looking down again on the passing tide of life beneath; "I think you are not glad these people are coming. I think you are displeased."

He shrugged his shoulders lazily—a gesture easily caught from the infectious habit all about him.

"One ought to love one's cousin," she said, with a fine little air of gravity that amused him.

"I don't find that commandment in the Decalogue."

"I shall love mine when I know her," she answered, as if the argument were final.

"And as for our cousinship," he went on, "it is so many times removed that we gave up the conundrum long ago. I don't suppose we should count kin out of Scotland; and I only let him claim the honour when he is decently civil and respectful."

"Well, it's very nice of him to come all this way to see you. If Bell offered me a visit, I shouldn't be so grumpy."

"Mrs. Henshaw isn't my cousin, I thank the gods," he said fervently; "nor the fair Miss

Henshaw either! Will you tell me why they should come here?"

"Why should they not come here? Madrid isn't ours."

"Because we don't want them," he made bold to answer. "They have the whole of Europe for a happy hunting ground; why should they choose to descend on this special corner?"

"Perhaps they have been in every other corner already."

"I think we are very comfortable without them," he went on, unheeding. "We have no eligible young men for Mrs. Henshaw's investigation. Spanish grandees are out of the running. Worth's masterpieces and Miss Henshaw's smiles will be wasted here. Chester may amuse himself possibly—at our expense. He is a frivolous youth, and he will insist on our all being frivolous to keep him company. His object in life is to be amused. Are you prepared to minister to it, Di?"

"What a lot of words just to express that you are cross!" she said, laughing. She had a happy laugh. "As for me, I'm glad they are coming; we are stupid, we are dull, we want more life." She put out her two hands as if to welcome it. "A little bit of the outside world won't come amiss; I am quite ready for it."

"You will find it a bore."

"Oh no." She shook her head; it was his way to talk like that.

"Before you have been five minutes in their company the women will have told you—not in so many words, but all the same, very plainly—that the cut of your sleeve is antiquated, and your hairdressing all wrong, besides other unpalatable truths."

"Well, I can alter my sleeve."

She held up her arm and looked seriously at the loose white drapery falling away from her wrist.

"I wouldn't advise you," he said lazily. "Don't alter anything, Di."

"One can always learn, even though one is a provincial young person. Wait and you will see. You and the father won't need to be ashamed of me."

"That I think we may venture to promise."

He spoke carelessly. He had plucked a leaf from a shabby myrtle that grew in a green tub, and was absorbed in watching its destination as it floated over the balcony. She paid no heed to his assurance—too certain of it, perhaps, to value it.

"You haven't told me your cousin's name," she said, after a pause.

"Chester—Felix Chester."

She smiled.

"You think the last name is everything. Now to me there is a great deal in a Christian name. Why should people take refuge in initials? Your *a*'s and *j*'s and *p*'s mean nothing; they lock up all the poetry."

"Andrew, James, Peter. I fail to discover the poetry."

"You have it in Felix. Your cousin is lucky in his name, at any rate."

"And you in yours, Di." A quick ear might have detected a faint, pleasurable lingering on the little syllable. "If they had dubbed you Mary-Ann or Sarah, I'd have declined to guide you in the way you should go."

"I wonder they didn't call me after mamma. Di is all very well just now; but in a year or two I must be Deonys. A grey-haired wrinkled Di would be absurd—wouldn't it?"

"Not if that Di were you."

"Oh, I shall always be Di to you and the padre," she said simply.

"Even when you are a sprightly and venerable version of Miss Piper?"

"Oh, you may laugh," she said, with that little air of petulance he loved to provoke; "but you won't need to tell me when I am growing old."

"Then I must refrain from suggesting a

cap and blue spectacles as a graceful concession to your years? Mrs. Henshaw would take you for a model of Spanish fashions, and insist on Miss Henshaw's following suit. A cap, by the way, would suit her style of beauty well, only the idea would require to originate with herself. She is not like you; she refuses to take hints."

"Is she so very pretty?" Di asked, forgetting his badinage in her eagerness to learn all she could of this other girl.

"She used to be."

"Used to be? Is she not so now?"

"It would be dangerous to hazard an opinion; but, as she hasn't reached that stage you were darkly hinting at just now, I think we may venture to believe that she is still beautiful. Prince Alasnam, at least, thinks he has found the diamond statue," he said to himself, with an odd smile.

"I think it is dangerous to ask you any questions to-day," she retorted, turning away from him.

They were silent after that, while the sun travelled round, falling dazzlingly on the chalk-coloured fronts of the houses opposite, leaving them in a sharply-defined band of shadow. The crowd was beneath them now; but one or two beggars, who made capital out of their sores,

were still visible, courting the heat, the light touching the warm brown of their rags. In the Puerta itself the coming and going had in nowise abated. Ralph Malleson from his corner commanded a lottery office, on the steps of which an agent was busy. It was the work of his idle moments to speculate on the numbers that agent would seduce with his blandishments, but the calculation grew laborious.

Presently a new sound invaded the square—a strain of broken music, and then a glitter of colour and of flashing points of light, as a regiment of troops crossed the wide, flagged space between the straggling mules, the whining beggars, and the few, the very few, who had work to do, and were doing it. The men marched at a quick, odd pace, as if they were hasting to action in the next street.

"Did you ever see such a shabby set of fellows?" said Ralph. "It's impossible not to feel yourself a superior sort of animal when you look at them."

She did not answer, as she bent forward to glance at the procession, which was over in a moment. She was thinking all the while that soon she should see Miss Henshaw. It needed no great exercise of her woman's wit to know that this was the girl whom Ralph Malleson and Felix Chester had both loved, and whom

Mr. Chester—represented to be lucky in everything—had no doubt won. That bit of the story would soon unfold itself. This maiden—young for her years and quite unversed in love, as yet a high mystery to her—was sure that it could not be hidden from her. Love must have its own fair signs which any eye could read.

Ralph Malleson had forgotten his cousin, and was looking at the girl leaning idly over the iron railing. He had known her for a long time—almost the whole of her life and the best part of his own—but to look at her was one of the few things of which he never tired. Her profile was turned towards him, the full-lidded grey eyes were cast down, the flexible mouth was in grave repose. As he looked at her, he hoped idly that she would not be persuaded to change the fashion of her hair. It was a warm brown colour, and it was swept round her head in a single thick fold; he thought it the perfection of hairdressing.

The hum of the crowd came up to them, and made their own silence seem more curiously intense. Neither felt inclined to break it. Malleson reflected that he might not have many more opportunities of leaning against this particular window-frame and looking undisturbed at Deonyś Ouvry, set clear and statuesque against a band of intense blue sky, and the

reflection was disagreeable. This widening of their circle would bring many changes, and his life had reached the point when change is but coldly received.

As for his companion, her mood was directly opposed to his: she was eager where he held back grudgingly, impatient where he was indifferent, young enough yet to feel sure that every new experience must be a happy one. He felt sometimes, with an unexpressed touch of sadness, how little they had in common, though they were such fast friends; not even the same standpoint from which to view their world. His glance travelled backward and hers onwards; for her as yet every breath of air was a caress, every stray sunbeam a promise of brightness to come.

Presently a little sound, very audible, came to them from the room behind the balcony. She turned and their eyes met. They both laughed.

"The heat makes the father so sleepy," she said.

"It lasts long this year."

"Your friends will feel it—after cold England."

"Not they," he answered lightly; "at least, if they do, they won't acknowledge it. It is quite worth grilling to make a little sensation,

and to come to Spain with the possibility of being detained is to make a little sensation, even if a very little one, in their set."

"They may come for better reasons than that."

"That reason is superlatively good. If you knew the immense importance of getting an inch ahead of your neighbours, you would not talk of the heat, Di."

"I think you are growing cynical," she said, severely.

"Not I! Ask the ladies if you don't believe me. They will tell you I am right. As for Prince Alasnam, we all know what his mission is."

"It's too hot for riddles," she said with dignity. "When you feel less cross you may come in and have some tea."

She passed him and went in at the low window.

"You want some tea too, eh, padre? Oh, what a lazy old father it is to sleep so long!"

She knelt down by the shabby sofa and lightly touched the grey hair spread out upon the pillow.

It was a noble face, you would have said if you had seen Mr. Ouvry open his calm, pale-blue eyes and look at his daughter. Deonys got her clear outlines from him, but there the

likeness ceased. There was a subtle difference in the expression of the two faces. Perhaps in the father's the eyes were too pale and cold, or the lines of the mouth too irresolute. It took Malleson a long time to make up his mind, but when he had made it, he came to the conclusion that Mr. Ouvry's face ought not to be called noble. At fifty or sixty a man's features are a tolerably correct index to his character, if you have the skill to read them aright, that is to say. Malleson believed himself skilful; but he told his thoughts to no one, and he got on excellently with Di's father.

"Some tea? Yes; I think I grow weaker every day, Di."

"Oh, it is the heat," she answered cheerfully. "It is September now; it can't last much longer."

"It seems to me as if it would go on for ever."

"I wish it might, except for you." She rose as she spoke and let down the long dark awning of the window nearest him. "It is my lot to wish all alone to-day—for the sun which you hate, and for the English ladies whom Ralph hates!"

"What is that?" said Malleson, catching the sound of his own name and stepping in.

"Padre, do you know what is going to

happen to-morrow?" she said, ignoring Mr. Malleson and his curiosity.

"To-morrow?" Mr. Ouvry sat up, looking sleepy and rather bewildered.

"I've had a telegram from Chester," said Malleson," seating himself lazily in an armchair. "They are at Burgos. We may look for them to-morrow about this time."

"Chester,—that's the young man they are bringing with them?"

"Yes," said Malleson gravely; "that just expresses it. I dare say Felix would put it the other way, though. I've no doubt he thinks he is bringing the ladies here."

"Ah," said Mr Ouvry; and it is impossible to describe the amount of meaning with which that little word was charged. He rose gracefully, suppressing a yawn.

"I suppose we must exert ourselves, then. No more laziness, eh, Di? No more after-dinner napping. It's important that our friends should be properly received. They will expect to be amused."

"You may leave all that to me, sir I'll initiate Chester, and he'll be charmed to act as guide to the ladies."

"Not at all," said the older man urbanely. "I trust I have not forgotten how to exercise hospitality, though of late my opportunities

have been few. Di and I will do our best; but you must help us," he added politely—he was always very polite—"we count on you, you know." If Malleson smiled behind his beard it was only at the demure look on Di's face.

"First, he must be more amiable, papa. If you knew how cross he has been! Oh yes, you may smoke; that will cure you." She gave him royal permission, for he had pulled out his pipe, and was looking at her deprecatingly.

It was an understood thing that he might smoke there as much as he chose, and he took large advantage of the understanding, but he never began without first asking her pleasure.

"Have you been down to the house?" Mr. Ouvry asked, daintily rolling a small cigarette between his long thin fingers. He had beautifully-shaped hands and filbert nails, signs of gentlemanly descent which he prized.

"Yes, an hour or more ago."

"What news? Anything going on?"

"Nothing special. The old story. Pi-y-Margall acting Cassandra as usual."

"It's about time for another *pronunciamiento*: this heat will get into the people's blood; we want a little revolution to clear the air."

"And your friends?" said Di, looking up

from the window where she was bending over a piece of work.

"They will expect it. Have you forgotten what I told you? A revolution and a bull-fight. Depend on it Mrs. Henshaw has bargained for these, whatever happens."

"She won't like the bull-fight." Di shook her head.

"My daughter has never seen one," said Mr. Ouvry gravely, as if he were imparting a mysterious piece of information. "It's a barbarous spectacle, a relic of heathendom. I don't consider such sights fit for ladies."

"Certainly not," said Malleson with vigorous emphasis.

"You know I never wanted to go to one." Di looked at them reproachfully. "As for revolutions, if Mrs. Henshaw stays here long enough she will grow tired of them."

"She may come in for something like a real one, though," said Malleson carelessly.

The men fell to talking politics in desultory fashion between the puffs of smoke, while Di's needle was pulled languidly out and in. Generally she listened with keen interest to these discussions of the political weather, into which every one falls instinctively in Spain, where the cone is perpetually hoisted in token of coming storm; but to-day there were other interests

which were more urgent. Malleson's answers were given rather at random, for his mind was wandering too. He was looking half absently at the young girl, who had dropped her work and was staring at the bit of deepening sky above the opposite roofs, her thoughts not with them at all. He remembered her words to him a little while ago. There was in her attitude a calm and happy expectancy; she was waiting confidently for what life should bring her. She wore a white dress scantily and simply made, and it seemed to gather the failing light all to itself. Her figure was slender and very girlish as yet, but it gave promise of a fine and charming womanhood.

The room where these three people sat was shabby, almost melancholy, in the dusky twilight, and yet picturesque. Mr. Ouvry had *dilettante* tastes and a little money—nobody quite knew how much—and he had gathered some things worth having about him. Ralph Malleson, too, had the instincts of a collector, and had dug up some treasures from the Rastro —the Wardour-street of Madrid. The floor was paved in rough blocks of black and white marble with a rug or two of good blended colour and design here and there spread over it. There was some genuine tapestry which relieved the blankness of one wall; and a good deal of

tattered and tarnished embroidery, of which Di was very proud, hung over the backs of the chairs and sofa. On a high bracket a jar of rough pottery held a handful of flowers and on the top of the old-fashioned piano, which had belonged to her mother, Di's birds twittered and sang in their gilded cage. The chairs were all comfortable and much worn; the books that lay about were old favourites; the newspapers were legion. The whole had an air of permanence: it was a room that had been lived in for a long time and had gathered associations about it. Behind the tapestry hanging was a little alcove, supposed to be Di's own special sanctum, but she did not often sit there; loneliness had no charm for her.

She rose and dropped her work.

"Here is tea at last. Oh, Concha!" she exclaimed with smiling reproach, "when will you learn that we don't like it boiled?"

"She wants to bring out all its medicinal qualities," said Malleson, rising and helping with the cups. "She has a tender regard for our health."

"She ought to know by this time." Di smiled at the old black-eyed serving-woman with a bright handkerchief tied under her withered chin. "You think we ought to drink nothing but coffee, eh, Conchita?"

"Ca!" said the woman, with true Castilian contempt. "If the séñorita will poison herself with that stuff it is not for me to hinder."

She planted the tray before her young mistress and left the room with a majestic step.

"Now, I wonder what she thinks of us," said Mallesor, helping himself to bread and butter. "A sort of lofty pity is her attitude towards me. 'What a poor thing is man,' she seems to say every time she condescends to look at me. As for you, Di, you are a misguided child on whom reason would be recklessly wasted. Do you think she pleads for our enlightenment in those tremendous prayers she makes in the Carmen? I met her coming home this morning, and if ever a woman looked at me from a pinnacle of conscious superiority, that woman was Concha."

Deonys smiled.

"She is very good; she goes every day, and I don't think we are the worse for her prayers."

"They haven't had much effect, seemingly. Perhaps it is our obstinate adherence to our errors that gives her such an air of unrewarded virtue."

"I won't have you laugh at her," said Di hotly. "I wonder what I should have done without her, with only two men to look after me when I was little!"

"She's been with us a long time," said Mr. Ouvry, stirring his tea. "As for her church going, I never interfere. Women like that sort of thing; it gives a colour to their lives, I suppose. She came to us when you were a mere baby, Di."

"Yes, when mamma died," said Deonys quietly.

No one spoke for a few moments. Malleson had noticed before that such rare mention as was ever made of the dead mistress of the house was made alone by Deonys; a simple word now and then showing that the lost mother was often in her thoughts. She seemed to have built up some little theories about her, and to hold to them, though her father never by any word of his added to her slender stock of knowledge. It was, perhaps, just this silence on his part that made the girl cling so tenderly to the very little she knew.

Malleson, too, had his picture of his friend's wife, whom he had never seen, and it was about as correct as most imaginary portraits. It was Di who sat as his model. He was sure she must be like her mother, because she was so unlike her father. He insisted very much to himself on that point—she was quite unlike her father. The dead woman must have been young and pretty, and full of charming little

ways, that every now and then reappeared in her child; perhaps naturally gay, but more likely sad, and possibly unhappy. The sadness and unhappiness were after-thoughts, no doubt unconsciously added to the mental outline after he had come to that conclusion we know of touching Mr. Ouvry's expression. But whatever she had been, had felt, or suffered, was all matter of idle speculation, for she had died long enough ago for every one seemingly to have forgotten her, except the little girl whose knowledge was of the slenderest.

At moments such as the present his instinctive impulse was always to comfort her for that old loss. It seemed, somehow, as if she had suffered more than other girls who were motherless. Yet her father was kind to her up to the limits of his nature; she, at least, found nothing wanting in his love. When next he spoke to her, it was to persuade her to go out with him. The swift descending darkness had already come, and the room was full of shadows, out of which Di's dress gleamed whitely. Outside the slow procession of the stars had begun.

She went obediently and put on her hat.

"Won't you come too, padre?" she asked, lingering at his side.

"Not to-night; I don't feel equal to the exertion; it's all very well for you young

people. Concha may bring the lamps and the *Imparcial.*"

Malleson had waited almost impatiently for his answer. Yet, a moment later he was ashamed of his impatience—of the persistent doubt that made him critical of every word spoken by this placid, polite gentleman.

"Shall I not stay and read to you, father?"

"By no means, my child. Don't think of me; go and enjoy yourself with our good friend," said Mr. Ouvry, with an air of making a very gracious concession.

"I believe you wanted to stay," said Ralph reproachfully. "You can have your father at any time, and yet you grudge this one hour to me. Our last, very likely."

"Is that why you are so cross? Do you mean to say good-bye to me to-night? Don't you know that I wanted to come?"

"Then where shall we go?" said Ralph with alacrity. "Let us make the most of our reprieve. To-morrow this arm and this tongue will be devoted to Mrs. Henshaw's service—a walking Baedeker or Murray—a Lempriere—a 'Things a lady would like to know'—a general encyclopædia of useful, or useless, information; that's what I shall become a few hours hence. Yes, we may as well take a sorrowful farewell of each other to-night. Our idle days are over."

"Will Miss Henshaw expect me to know everything—to answer all her questions?" said Di, in a troubled voice.

"Well, I think not," he answered gravely; "she has a special and particular guide of her own, you see, and she will be satisfied with his answers. You will be expected to walk on the other side of the lady and to carry her reticule, and generally to corroborate all my remarks. If you value your peace of mind, don't contradict me."

"I am too wise to do that," she said, with a mocking, mischievous smile. "Come down to the Prado, and see if the music will make you better."

They struck down a dark and narrow street, sombrely shaded; the strip of sky seen between the tall, shuttered houses—pale, as if the heat of the day had burned the deep tone out of it—was pierced with a thousand points of light not yet at their brightest. The crowd, shaking off the languor of the burning hours, had all gone streaming down the broad Alcala. At a turn of the road they came suddenly on the Prado, brilliant with clustered lights and alive with music.

"How vulgar all that looks!" said Malleson, stopping to stare at it. "What a hideous substitute for the stars those yellow earth lights

are! If people would only understand that music is never so perfect as when heard in the dusk. But they want to look at each other, I suppose, and to criticise the fit of their neighbours' gowns."

"We don't want to look at them. Let us go over there, under the trees."

He secured two chairs and carried them off to the far outskirts of the crowd, giving the little refreshment tables and the chattering groups about them a wide berth. A little timid breeze had sprung up; it made a small shivering sound in the green crown above them —a sharp rustle, no longer the full, soft murmur of leaves rich in May sap. It carried the music from them, pleasantly lessening its volume. The long, formal avenue behind them looked mysterious and ghostly, full of undefined shadows. As the wind swayed the branches one might have dreamt that an army was creeping stealthily onwards to surprise the gay, defenceless crowd yonder under the brilliant lights; or was it a company of sad old ghosts come back to haunt the scene of ended joys? It was an hour for any dreaming. The weary earth was growing cool now—resting after the burden of the day. There was a rare, reviving quality in the air; the mystery of the night brought a great sense of peace with it.

"What is her name?" said Di absently, after a long silence.

"Whose name?"

"I beg your pardon"—she started and blushed —"I was thinking of Miss Henshaw."

He laughed.

"I told you we should be effaced. The process has begun, it would seem. We are creatures of one idea. I was thinking of Miss Henshaw, too."

"If she is so very beautiful she must be worth thinking about."

He tilted his chair, and looked up at the sky between the leaves.

"I suppose people would call her a beauty; that is different from being beautiful, isn't it?"

"I don't know; it is too fine a distinction for me. I never saw a beautiful person."

What was it that made this grim Ralph smile so pleasantly to himself as he looked at the stars?

"She has an ugly name, though. Even you would fail to find any lurking poetry in Philippa."

Di's next question was asked rather hesitatingly.

"You said people thought her beautiful; don't you think her so?"

"I have seen faces that I prefer." He brought his chair sharply to the ground.

Another silence, while the champagne song from Don Giovanni rang out lustily, coming to them in their far-off corner in bursts of cheerfulness. The crowd was all in the distance—a dark mass, with little relief of colour.

"How sombre we are," said Ralph, turning to her with a smile. "You and I might say with Jessica—

'I am never merry when I hear sweet music.'

There has been nothing of the revel in our last hours of freedom."

"Don't talk like that, you stupid boy!"

"Well, then, in our last duet, if you like that better. After this we shall be a trio."

"Listen," she said, holding up her hand. "They have begun the 'Prayer,' from Freischütz."

The wind carried the sounds partly from them, and only a broken strain or two—a high upper note like an ejaculatory cry or a wail of distress—reached them.

"Shall we go nearer?" he began; but Di started suddenly.

"What's that?" she cried; and then she laughed, as a figure passed from out the gloom behind them. "It's only a sugar-water boy! But it is rather ghostly here, after all."

"Come here, you young villain," said Ralph,

beckoning to the lad who carried a tray of glasses. "What do you mean by frightening the lady with your creeping, dodging ways? Will you have some, Di? You must take it on faith, then; it's too dark to be critical about the tumbler."

"Oh, it's you, José?" She nodded brightly to the boy, who grinned in pleased recognition. "His glasses are always beautifully clean, Ralph."

"Trade must be bad, surely, that he comes all this way for customers. Is this not a thirsty night, eh?"

"I saw the señorita," said José, pocketing the little bit of silver Ralph tossed him, and going off well pleased with his jingling tray.

"So that is one of your conquests, Miss Di. And I suppose you drank that sickly stuff just to please him? You are quite capable of it."

"No. I like it," she smiled. "Don't go just for a minute yet"—for he had risen; "wait till some of the people go away."

"With all my heart. I'll wait as long as you like," he said, sitting down again.

"Ralph," she turned to him earnestly, and laid her hand on his, "I want to ask you something."

"Well?"

"Are you——" She hesitated. "Does it really vex you that Miss—that these people are

coming—because, if it is to make you unhappy —I——"

"You would be sorry for me. But you needn't be sorry for me, Di." He smiled as he laid his hand very kindly on hers. "As for compassion, it is Prince Alasnam who is to be pitied. What do you say? Shall we pull him out of this business, or shall we leave the rash youth to his fate?"

"How can I tell?" she said, with a touch of impatience, rising hurriedly. "It is time to go home."

Nothing more was said; but when they passed under the gaslights she stole a look at him.

What she expected to read by that look I hardly know. She saw nothing that she had not seen always. A man, slightly built and spare, whose thirty-five years made him seem quite old in her eyes, dressed so carelessly as to be almost shabby. He was not handsome but his was a face that, having looked at once, you were inclined to look at again—a face with a history. The worn lines were not there for nothing. You knew instinctively that at some time or other this man had taken life hard, and had felt keenly. His eyes were dark, and their habitual expression slightly mocking. His hair was already streaked with gray, and rather scant at the temples; one lock had a

way of falling over his brow, and it was a trick of his to thrust it back which you soon grew to notice. He gave it an impatient toss as Deonys looked at him, and she wondered to what remembrance he was bidding defiance.

Somehow she knew instinctively that he had a sad background to his life, but what made up the sadness she neither knew then nor at any later time. She never asked or cared to know more than he chose to tell; she trusted him without thinking about it. He seemed to belong to her whole life; she could not remember the time when she had not known him. Madrid had been his home for more years than she could recall, and, except on brief visits to England, he never left it. Every one knew that he acted as correspondent to a London paper and that he added something to a small private income by other literary tasks; but his past history was a sealed book. If he had suffered he had strength enough left to keep silence; he did not choose to pose before the world as a disappointed man.

Di's thoughts were all given to that bit of his life—not the most tragic, she felt sure—that had to do with Miss Henshaw. He had cared for her once, did he care for her still? She had an immense curiosity on that point, and Malleson's face told her nothing.

CHAPTER II.

"The gentleman is not in your books."

It was still early in the night when Ralph Malleson left Deonys Ouvry at her own home. He declined her invitation to supper, but he waited at the door till he knew her to be safely within. Standing in the darkness of the outer passage he heard her bright good-night to the portera, who thrust her head out of the little glass box as the girl went by; then her light footfall sounded on the stair, and presently there was the noise of a door opened and closed. After that—silence.

The night seemed darker and more dull to him now that his companion had gone, for on their way back from the Prado, Di had flung off her grave mood and been very gay and full of happy anticipation. He turned away and crossed the Puerta del Sol. It was slowly subsiding into quietness, except at one corner where there was a great café, and where the

lights flashing out threw a streak of brilliance across the pavement. He glanced in as he passed. It was still full of people, seated at the little marble-topped tables, whole families—down to the baby swaddled like a small Egyptian mummy—sipping sugar-water, eating ices, chattering or listening placidly to the shrill music of the band. At an angle near the window two old men were eagerly absorbed in a game of dominoes. He had come there once or twice with Di and her father on her birthday or other little festival, and on those occasions Mr. Ouvry had relaxed from his gracious dignity, and had condescended to take a suave interest in the tempting little dinner Malleson had pleased himself by ordering. It was all for Di's pleasure, of course, even when the birthday was his own, and she had insisted that it should be kept with due ceremony, for to give this young girl pleasure had come to be a great object in his life—a life otherwise circumscribed enough.

Those had been pleasant days when his half-indolent plans for her amusement had so readily succeeded, but already they seemed to belong to the past. He was older than Di—old enough to have found out long ago what change meant, and to feel sure that after this widening of her outlook that was involved in the coming

these stangers, the old narrow round would never more have power to satisfy her. He would have kept her, if he could, like the young princess who slept her charmed sleep in the wood, knowing nothing of the outer world but what reached her in her pure young dreams. He could not sympathize with her desire to become acquainted with the world at first hand. This wise Mr. Malleson would have had her to be content with what he chose to tell her of it. He wanted to keep her always young and innocent. Her child-like qualities were much too precious to be lightly perilled. In this masculine manner he would have settled everything, forgetting that, though Beauty sleeps through long ages, the waking kiss comes at last.

For himself, the very contemplation of change was hateful. He had fled long ago from the battle and struggle of life; he had stranded himself here where prizes and rewards were out of his reach, where society made no claims on him, where he might pass his days in an insignificance that was full of peace.

It was, perhaps, an ignoble aim enough, if aim it might be called—a narrow and limited horizon to set before him, but then no wider horizon would have had any inspiration for him. His time for ambition, for the wild

coursing of the blood though his veins, for the leap of pulses and the throbbing of eager desires was over, long over. The very thought of wearing a dress-coat and putting on tight boots and a white tie, of reburnishing his company manners, and practising once more the polite services and small attentions to etiquette that are the due of fashionable and pretty women, was irksome to this confirmed Bohemian, and drew from him a half-audible groan as he went quickly up the now dark and silent streets.

Thinking ruefully of these things, and—with a half-humorous smile that had no signs of heart-break in it—of his last meeting with Philippa Henshaw, he found himself at the northern outskirts of the city, climbing steeply up a sharp ascent. At the top of the hill there was a break between the tall houses. Here, on the outer verge of the city, the lights were few and the darkness vast: those deep abysses of gloom between the scattered dwellings were, he knew, but outlets to the great silent plain beyond; the blackness ahead of him concealed a formal avenue of stunted trees that at mid-day gave but scant shade to the sandy road. There was now a wide, uninterrupted field of sky above him, no longer pale, but of the deep intense blue-black that gives double brilliance

to the stars. He paused to look up, taking off his hat that he might gaze unimpeded at the radiance above him. The stars had for him an immense satisfaction; not a question or a problem that their endless calm did not silence or reduce to nothingness. Orion's shining belt, Aldebarân red and glowing, the clustered Pleiades—he had his greeting for them all; he and these sleepless watchers above him sharing together and alone the secrets of the night.

But as he advanced a step or two, there were signs of human companionship, of one sharer in his vigil. Lights that were of the earth streamed from an upper row of uncurtained windows. He noticed them, well pleased. Next to the stars, he knew of no better soother or sympathizer than Mrs. Gordon. He knocked the ashes from his pipe and pocketed it, and entering a side-door left open for late comers, crossed the wide court and ran quickly up a shallow flight of steps. At the second floor he halted. His summons brought first a slow and cautious tread, then the covering of the grille was drawn sharply back, and a suspicious eye applied to the opening.

Malleson smiled at the formality.

"It is I, Miss Barbara," he said, "a person of peace."

"Eh, is it you, Mr. Malleson?" The door was now thrown open with alacrity. "To think that I should have fallen into such spying and keeking ways, and you standing at the back of the door! It's an evil country this, for the morals."

The speaker removed her gaunt person from the doorway, and he stepped in at her invitation.

"All right, Miss Barbara," he said cheerfully; "I might have been an insinuating foreigner, with 'burgling' intentions, for all you could tell; and there are the silver plate and family jewels that I know lie heavily on your mind——"

"Indeed, Mr. Malleson, it's me that lies on them, to tell the truth," she interrupted him, forgetting grammar in her eagerness, and speaking in an impressive whisper. "I've had it weighing on me this long while back to let you know where I kept them. You can't tell what may happen in this godless land, and it's but right that some sensible person should share the secret. As for Mrs. Gordon, poor body, I wouldn't fash her with the responsibility; but I've always held you to be a trustworthy lad."

"The soul of honour, Miss Barbara."

"Well, well, let other folks say that; it's not becoming to be boastful. Listen!" She leant forward, and laid a large and heavy hand

on his sleeve, while she spoke in an undertone with slow distinctness. "It's all sewed up among the feathers of the bed I brought from Scotland with me. You won't find the like of it in Spain."

"No; a little knobby, isn't it? I've heard of a crumpled roseleaf causing a man a wakeful night—but tea-kettles and dish-covers!"

"I gathered every one of the feathers with my own hand," she said, paying no heed to his light interruption, "and nothing but a breast one among them. There's the big tray that's been in the Gordon family for generations, and the dozen solid spoons Mary brought with her when she married Harry (the only fortune she brought him, poor lad, but I'm bound to admit they're good of their kind), and the colonel's Indian teapot, sugar-basin and cream-ewer, not to speak of the cups Harry won when he was a lad at college."

"Miss Barbara,"' he said, with mock horror, while she paused to remember the next item on her list, "you are a martyr to the family heirlooms!"

"You would spread it all out on the sideboard, I suppose," she retorted grimly; "and as good as invite the first Spaniard that came in to put the spoons in his pocket. If that's you're way of thinking, I'm sorry I spoke."

"You may trust me. I'll know where to find the spoil when you have given up your life in its defence."

"Who spoke of lives?" she said crossly. "I don't hold with that light way of speaking. I thought you were a lad of sense."

"But indeed I am," he assured her with fine gravity. "I'll keep it a profound secret, Miss Barbara. Wild horses won't drag it from me. And now, may I go in? It is not too late?"

"Oh yes, go in," she said, offended by his light acceptance of the trust reposed in him. "I wish it was too late; this turning of night into day is against Scripture, and common-sense, too. But Mary was always fond of her own way."

Miss Barbara flung open a door at the end of the passage, and stood aside to let him enter, but she did not follow him. Her reined-in displeasure would not allow her to give any countenance to the young man who was a privileged visitor, and chose to come at the most unreasonable hours.

His eyes were almost blinded by the glare of light after the semi-darkness of the lobby. The room he entered was large and scantily furnished; the walls and ceilings were gaily frescoed; the floor was of wood inlaid in a close pattern; the furniture was excellent in design and uphols[illegible]

but necessity, not luxury, had been the guiding principle in its choice.

"We have too many imaginary needs," Mrs. Gordon was used to say. "My only imperative wants are light and space; the cushioned downiness of your English boudoirs would choke me."

She lay now on a crimson sofa, in the centre of the many soft-burning lamps disposed about the room—a little fragile, white-faced woman, who suffered a great deal and said nothing about it.

She held out her hand with a smile. She had a singularly pleasant smile.

"What new weakness of mine has Barbara been revealing?" she asked.

"Only your inability to take care of your own property. She has been making me co-trustee. I consented amiably, since she didn't insist on my secreting any of the plate in my——" He stopped with a face of dismay. "I was almost letting out the hiding place!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not a bit the wiser," she laughed. "Poor Barbara! she thinks more of that old silver than of anything else in the world. I am not trusted because I'm not a true Gordon, only an interloper by marriage, so I am just allowed a peep now and then at my Harry's race cups that we were both so proud of in the old days at home."

"Let us talk of something else," he said; "the subject is full of danger, and my reputation for sense is at stake."

"Tell me about yourself, then. Do you know it is a whole week since you were here last? How is the work getting on?"

He laughed with amusement at her serious face.

"I don't write it with a big W; that would be to write myself an ass."

"You don't magnify your office. I must set you to read 'The Hero as Man of Letters' to me."

"That I may feel still further snubbed and sat upon? It's bad enough to have to supply a given quantity of 'spoon-meat for a public in a rudimentary state of intelligence' without being further depressed by disagreeable comparisons. I'll have none of your 'Hero.'"

"Think of the lives you help to influence," she said.

It was on an old ground of contention between them, and she was apt to take a sentimental and an exalted view of his calling.

Mr. Malleson smiled sardonically.

"I'm too old to be mov'd by that flattering unction," he said. "Say all that to Felix, he'll believe you. I'll stake Miss Barbara's best teapot he has provided himself with the biggest

diary London can produce, and firmly believes he is going to write the book of the season."

"Who is Felix? and what do you mean, sir, by disposing in that frivolous way of the family plate?"

"Felix? Oh, Chester, my young cousin," he said absently. "The boy has always some new fad he swears by."

He had been walking with long steps about the room, after a fashion of his when he was restless, but now he came and sat down near her sofa, first removing one of the many lamps to a little distance.

"Take them all but one," she said, noticing the action. "Barbara will be only too glad to check my extravagance. I am thoughtless to others in my love of light."

"No, that will do. Now you can't read my face too closely while I question you."

"Begin. I am ready to tell the whole truth."

"I know it," he said; but still he did not begin. "I have just left Di," he said, after a little pause.

"She ran in yesterday to tell me the great news."

"Then she has spared me a long growl. You know Mrs. Henshaw, and you must instinctively understand my feelings——"

"Not so fast; I have not seen her for years,

remember. Not since we were both young, before her marriage and mine. People change as they grow older."

"The child was mother of the woman in her case, or I'm much mistaken. You didn't know her husband?"

He asked the question carelessly. There were many things he wanted to know, but this was not particularly one of them.

"I have just seen him—I never knew him. He was an elderly man, and reputed to be very rich, but that turned out to be a mistake, I believe, or else he lost his means; for I heard that at his death the widow and her child were but indifferently provided for."

"And yet they find money enough to travel. They have been all over Europe. That costs something. I wonder why they are coming here."

"Perhaps because they have been everywhere else," she answered, as Di had already answered. "Some people take a pride in leaving nothing undone."

"Mrs. Henshaw is not a person of that kind. She wouldn't take all the worry of a long and troublesome journey just to complete her [illegible] of European capitals. That may be part of the inducement, of course. That, and the being able to speak of the feat afterwards; but, depend

upon it, there is some stronger motive in the background."

"What makes you think that?" she asked gravely.

"My profound knowledge of human nature," he answered with a smile. "Psychological analysis, as ponderous reviewers say, is my *métier*. The apparent inducements are not sufficient—*ergo*, some secret spring is at work."

"Well, there's your cousin—isn't he inducement enough? Don't call me a malicious and match-making old woman, but I suppose I'm right in thinking the world would consider him a prize. He is rich, isn't he?"

"He has a capital income. He had a long minority. He must have five or six thousand a year."

"And Philippa Henshaw has no fortune except her beauty. But I hear that she is very attractive; and I think I have heard, too, that your cousin—— "

"I'm afraid that will hardly do. Felix has been dancing attendance on Miss Henshaw for the last season or two. He makes no secret of his feelings. I did my best to check his ardour—with the usual success."

"But if she is nice!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, clasping her thin hands.

"Ah, if she is nice!" he answered in an in-

describable tone. "You think young Felix is coming to see me?"

"Why not?" It seemed to her but a proper respect on the young man's part.

"And that they are following to keep the prize in sight?" he laughed, with a touch of amusement. "It is all the other way. Felix isn't pining to see me. He never dreamt of coming till Mrs. Henshaw gently hinted her intention of honouring Madrid with her presence. Then he packed his portmanteau fast enough. Now, what I want to know is—why is she coming here?"

"My dear Ralph, I never knew you to be so curious, and—so suspicious before."

"This touches very closely on my comfort, you see. Nothing like that for making a man keen-sighted."

He rose and took a turn or two up and down the long room, then he said abruptly:

"I can't help harbouring a suspicion that Ouvry has something to do with it. He's a wonderfully mysterious old gentleman. There are unexplored depths and cavities beneath that placid exterior, depend on it."

If he expected her to follow up his lead, to join him in his conjectures or to throw light on his perplexity, he was disappointed. She said nothing at all.

"They knew each other long ago?" he questioned.

"Yes," she answered, almost reluctantly. "They were intimate once. Mr. Ouvry was closely associated with Mrs. Henshaw's father in business—as a younger partner, or confidential clerk."

"And this friendship did not last?"

"There was some coldness or disagreement, I believe."

"Dont tell me anything more," he said, pausing in his walk to look down on her with a smile. "You are right, as usual. It is no affair of mine. If he has any secrets, I hope I am not mean enough to seek to fathom them while I call him my friend. He is Di's father; one would pardon him an immense amount of misdeeds on that score alone. It is his chief virtue that he is Di's father."

"But I don't know of anything that you and I are called on to forgive," she said earnestly. "His life has been open to us all for a long time; as for anything that may have gone before—he has as much right to keep silence about his past as the others of us."

"As I claim to have, you mean, and perhaps with as good a cause. By Jove!" he broke out suddenly, "what a queer set we are, we English here! Ishmaelites and outcasts, most

of us; not one of us, I suppose, that has not somehow or other made a mess of his life."

"Not you," she said quickly, with a certain pride.

"Not I?" I should have thought I was the most conspicuous failure of them all."

"You must not class yourself with these others. Do you remember that time, long ago, when you came to me—you were a boy, then, hardly older that Di is now—and I made you tell me everything?"

"I remember," he said shortly. Then more lightly, "I was a weakling in those days, and thought nobody had a better ground of quarrel with the world than I. I've often wondered since at your patience with my ravings."

"Hush, hush," she said gently. "The only thing I have ever regretted—and I have grieved over it constantly since—is that I did not insist on writing to your grandfather."

"It would have been a mere waste of time and trouble," he said, tossing back his hair. "My grandfather had an undue share of the family temper, which isn't sweet at the best, and I'm afraid he would have given you a specimen of it. The Mallesons are a 'dour' race, as you say in the north, and they pride themselves on never changing. The old man has been true to the family tradition, for he has died without abating an inch of his claim."

"If you had only understood each other better!" she sighed.

"Understood each other!" he repeated; "there was no difficulty about that. He wanted me to bind myself to him body and soul, and to fling over poor Rod, and all for some paltry consideration of shillings and pence. That was to be my *reward*, forsooth! Well, I declined, and that was the best day's work I ever did. He has left his money to a big London charity; as for the title, which, unfortunately, he couldn't will away, poor old Rod has provided for it, in a most satisfactory manner, and now you want to make out that I'm eaten up with vexation and disappointment!"

She smiled at his tragic tone, but she said wistfully, "You ought to have had the best."

"And so I have," he retorted quickly. "I wouldn't change if I could do it by holding up one of my fingers. It was a blessed day for me when I shook myself free from the hateful conventionalities and caste prejudices of my native land. Here it is at least possible to live for yourself, and not for your neighbour; to act up to your convictions, and not according to the *rôle* society thrusts upon you. And now," he added, ruefully, "after all these years of peaceful obscurity, we are to be dragged out again, and made to play our parts on that hateful stage."

"Mrs. Henshaw isn't 'society,'" said Mrs. Gordon, interrupting this tirade with a smiling remonstrance.

"You think not? Wait till you see," he said, ominously. "Perhaps when Di is transformed into a young lady of the period, under the rule of a step-mother——"

"A stepmother! Oh, that could never be—never. I have good reasons for saying so. If you like"—she hesitated—"I will tell you what little I know about Mr. Ouvry, if there is any good end to be served."

"No, there could be no possible good in my knowing anything he chooses to keep to himself, unless it were to shield Di from trouble."

"I think you need not fear that, at least, for her. Mrs. Henshaw means well, I believe, and this proposed visit, I should imagine, is meant as a sign of restored friendliness—a flag of truce—an olive branch—whatever you like to call it."

"I should prefer the lady's coldness," he said, with a shrug.

"But we must think of Di."

"It is Di I am chiefly thinking of."

"It is something at least that heart-burnings and disagreements should not descend to her. Old quarrels are not a good legacy; the child must start clear of them."

"Still, with all your charity—and you have a

most inconvenient amount for a man who wants to have his growl—you can't call Mrs. Henshaw's company elevating or inspiring. Deonys had better never see anything of society at all than have her first glimpse of it through such a medium."

Mrs. Gordon turned so that she could face him. He had seated himself again near her sofa.

"We can't make the world anew for our little girl," she said gently, "or cushion it that she may not find out the hard places, after the fashion of a lady I knew who bandaged the legs of her tables and chairs in case her child should stumble against them. Di must take people as she finds them. If she makes some mistakes at first, she will choose the right friendships in the end."

"So be it, then. We must submit to the inevitable. You make a man good-natured against his will. I release you from the witness-box."

"And I think you ought to take my place there. It is my turn to become questioner. This Miss Henshaw—what sort of a girl is she? She is pretty?"

"Very pretty; quite unusually so. One of those blue-eyed, pink and white complexioned beauties you never see out of England.'

"How old is she?"

"Older than Di. About twenty-one, I should think; perhaps rather more."

"And clever?"

"Clever enough," he answered, with an odd smile. "She is good-natured, too, up to a certain point. There is every chance that you will like her."

"You speak as if that would be a misfortune!"

"She begins by fascinating most people. Whether the glamour lasts, that is another matter," he said, half to himself.

Mrs. Gordon was not listening. She summed up the items rapidly; they made a fair show. Taken as a whole, the picture was not unpleasant. There must be some solid foundation for such universal liking.

"She will make a nice companion for Di," she said cheerfully. "It is just what the child needs. You and I are too old and too grave for her, Ralph; we need not make an old woman of her before the time. You must bring Miss Henshaw to see me."

"Oh, certainly; and Mrs. Henshaw too?"

"That must be as she pleases," she answered, with a faint flush. "She may not care to renew the acquaintance."

"That means that you will not take any special pains to encourage her?"

"No, it means just what I said; but a young girl won't grudge half an hour to an old sick woman.

"Don't call yourself names, please. Miss Philippa will come without any encouragement at all, and you will pronounce her charming. Di will swear an eternal friendship for her; and Miss Barbara will think her almost good enough for a Gordon."

"And you?"

"And I? Ah, you forget, there are certain maladies one can't take twice. And now, good-bye. Miss Barbara is nursing her wrath, I know; let me escape before she visits it on my head."

"Come back soon," she called, as he reached the door.

He paused to look back with a smile.

"If she is unendurably tiresome I will reserve the right of coming to you for consolation," he said, and then he shut the door with commendable softness, remembering Miss Barbara.

After all, he carried away an impression she had not intended to leave on his mind.

"It is some old folly of a love entanglement," he said to himself, as he walked quickly through the now almost deserted streets. "Mrs. Henshaw is a lady of large imagination." His lips curled in half-contemptuous amusement. "One can hardly fancy Ouvry the object of a tender

passion; but these things are all a mystery. There's no accounting for a woman's fancies, or a man's either, for that matter. So long as this piece of middle-aged sentimentality—this holding out of the olive branch—does not affect Di, or disturb the child's peace, what does one need to care?"

So he went his way, a little more graciously disposed towards the universe in general, after the fashion of a man who has relieved his mind by airing his grievances. He dismissed the newcomers from his thoughts as he hung up his hat and sat down at his table laden with papers and writing materials; for, in spite of his slighting reference to it, he loved his work as he loved few things in life.

Mrs. Gordon, not yet delivered over to Miss Barbara's tender mercies, was holding audience of another kind in her large, brightly lit room.

"Have I done rightly, Harry?" she was saying to herself, murmuring half aloud in the absent way one quickly falls into who lives much alone, her large eyes—the only feature in her wasted face sickness had left beautiful—fixed and dreamy. "Have I done what you, with your larger knowledge, would counsel as the best to do? He loves the child, you see, though he hardly knows it himself, and he would have been hurt and angry for her sake. And you

would have me shield her from pain, wouldn't you, as you would have shielded our little girl, who is with you now?" Her thoughts had left Deonys, had travelled far afield, following wistfully the dead husband and child, so long unseen, and yet, as it seemed, always near.

Miss Barbara, coming in with rough brusqueness, was arrested by the solemn tenderness of the pale, patient face—that look that the mothers of lost children sometimes wear. She knew it well, and it touched some soft place in her honest heart, but she always considered it her duty to discountenance by every means in her power any sorrowful dwelling on the past.

"Come, come," she said, with authority in her voice, "it's not a time of night to begin thinking of them that are away. Just listen to yon old fool of a watchman screeching out twelve o'clock, disturbing honest folks in their first sleep."

"Don't scold me, Barbara"—Mrs. Gordon looked up into the hard, rough face with a smile—"for I've really been behaving beautifully."

"Scold you! I know better what's due to a Gordon, I hope, though you were born a MacGregor. It would be more to the purpose if I was to scold Mr. Malleson, keeping you up to this hour of night with his havers. I doubt

he's not just the douce, sober lad I took him to be. There was a lightness about him when I spoke of the plate that sits ill on a young man when you are giving a secret to his keeping. I don't hold with that easy way of passing everything off with a laugh and a joke. You would have thought it was common electro plate that you can buy in any Birmingham shop, to hear him talk."

"But, indeed, he was quite aware of the honour you were doing him in trusting him," said Mrs. Gordon, eager to reassure the angry spinster. "He told me about it."

"He never told you where it's hidden!" cried Miss Barbara, ready forthwith to give up the last shred of her confidence in man.

"No, not he." Mrs. Gordon repressed her inclination to smile with admirable success. "He did not betray the secret. I am just as ignorant of the hiding place as he was till to-night. No burglar will wrest the secret out of me. You have taken the best means to prevent that."

"Well, you haven't the courage of a Gordon, not that I'm blaming you for what is not your fault; we are all as we are made," she said, with lofty pity; "but I never was one to put temptation in the way of the weak. And maybe I wronged the lad," she added, with the air of

making a great concession; "but why couldn't he speak like a sensible man, instead of laughing like any bairn?"

"He will act like a man when the time comes. And, do you know," she went on, by way of changing the subject, "he is going to bring a beautiful and charming young lady—a sort of princess out of a fairy tale—to see us. He prophesies we shall both fall in love with her before we know what we are about."

Miss Barbara received this piece of news with depressing gloom.

"I wish I had held my silly, chattering tongue," she said, as she brushed her sister's hair. Miss Barbara took a secret pride, to which she would not have owned, in the long thick tresses now widely streaked with grey, that her young brother Harry had thought the most beautiful in the world. But to-night she had no heart in her work, and passed the brush listlessly up and down.

"If it's love nonsense he's got in his head," she said grimly, "it's little he'll care to help two old women like you and me. I'm sorely disappointed in that lad."

There rose before Mrs. Gordon a vivid mental vision of the man from whom she had just parted—a man worn and old before his time—and she smiled a little sadly at the misapplied

epithet. To Miss Barbara, gaunt, grim, and sixty, what was he but a boy, with a spirit of unpardonable levity and an incapacity for sense?

"There's Deonys," she went on presently, "in spite of her outlandish name, as good and as bonnie a girl as you'll find out of Scotland."

"Almost good enough for a Gordon," said the other mischievously.

But this was to Miss Barbara as the red rag to the bull.

"A Gordon, indeed! Set her up to look so high! It's not every one that's fit to mate with the old race, as you very well know yourself. Eh, but what am I saying!" She broke off suddenly. "And there's never a man among them left to choose wife or rear sons and daughters to carry on the old name; never a Gordon of the real old stock but you and me —two lone women in a foreign land."

An unmistakable tear fell plump on the long hair, which was now being twisted into a knot; but the next instant Miss Barbara was scolding vigorously.

"Come now, Mary, I never said you were to cry about it." (Mrs. Gordon's eyes were dry.) "I won't have you falling off your sleep at this time of night; it's not for us to be moaning and lamenting like other silly folks. You get into bed, and I'll read to ye. It's very comfort-

ing to the mind to be read out to, and you'll just not heed the sense, but go to sleep."

Mrs. Gordon submitted with gratitude for the kindness of the proposal, but not without a secret doubt as to the certainty of its soothing powers. Miss Barbara's reading was very different from her speech, which was homely, and with frequent lapses into her native Doric. Reading aloud was an accomplishment on which she prided herself. It had a flavour of the parish school about it that was arresting, but hardly tranquilizing. She delivered the matter in a high-pitched sing-song, giving due emphasis to all the large words and raising her voice at the end of every sentence, without paying any slavish attention to punctuation.

Mrs. Gordon shut her eyes, as she had been peremptorily commanded to do, and tried to think only of the familiar words and not of the medium through which they reached her. She feigned sleep so that Miss Barbara might retire complacently elated by the success of her plan; but long after the heavy breathing coming from the next room told of her companion's repose, her mind was actively awake, travelling now far back into the vanished past, now into the near future, sparing a tender thought, too, for the young girl who was almost like a second daughter, almost like the dear, dead child given

back in some inexplicable fashion to the mother's hungry love.

What vigorous anger would not Miss Barbara have shown, had she known through how many weary hours the vigil was kept. The French window was wide open (in defiance of burglars). There was at last a cool, refreshing wind; there were stars looking down out of the blue. And into the silence came once and again the watchman's hoarse cry, recording the slow hours, telling of the peace and serenity that wrapped about the sleeping world. It seemed—foolish thought though it was—to this one wakeful dreamer, a prophetic forecast of the sheltered, love-lit life that lay before Deonys, the little girl for whom so many hearts beat with a kindly solicitude.

CHAPTER III.

"Harsh discords and unpleasing sharps."

DEONYS was up betimes next morning and out almost before the streets were awake. She had her bodyguard with her—Concha, the faithful and grim old serving-woman, and a little maiden who was to act as her deputy while she told her beads in the Carmen, to guard the señorita from the too prying scrutiny of the students loitering to the university, or of the soldiers marching with brisk importance to the parade ground. They were each provided with a basket. Concha carried that which was to contain the supply of food for family consumption; Deonys had one of a lighter make on her arm and appeared anxious to conceal it from the sharp eyes of her attendant. Never before had the marketing seemed so prolonged a business, never the choice of sardines, legs and wings of chickens, the kid for roasting, so weighty a matter. She stood by in impatient

patience while the haggling and bargaining was conducted, the silver *pesetas* and the copper *cuartos* slowly counted out, and the small coin of compliments and greetings exchanged. It is always a long affair that traffic in pretty speeches; and you do not know the Spaniard if you imagine he will bestir himself because you are in haste.

Concha's basket was at last laden, crisp lettuces and vivid tomatoes at the top of all. In this land everything makes itself into a picture. The large, light market was now full of chattering groups, and the business of the day, which, here as elsewhere, consists too often in over-reaching your neighbour if you can, had fairly begun. Di knew the little comedy by heart: the voices raised in eager persuasion, hands in tragic despair as the fate of a single cuarto hangs in the balance, the quick surrender, the smiling, yet dignified indifference. She had watched it all a thousand times through every act with a keener sense of amusement than she could summon on this occasion, for to-day she was quickly weary of it all, and could hardly conceal her anxiety till Concha absorbed in her devotions.

At last they left the market, crossed a breadth of street already flooded with early sunshine, quickly lost to them in the gloom of a large,

bare church. When their eyes grew used to the dimness they saw that one or two of the market folk were before them: women, broad-shouldered and large-limbed, with bright handkerchiefs framing brown faces, kneeling beside their empty baskets; thanking the Madonna for an excellent sale and her gracious aid in victorious chaffering, yet not too absorbed in the patter of *aves* to have an eye to any chance opportunity that the lifting of the dingy curtain might bring; bargaining with one breath for a portion in heaven, but not uncareful, like a certain steward of old, of the mammon of unrighteousness; for the season of strangers had arrived, and any moment might produce a foreign milord or milady, on whom a little importunity would be well bestowed.

The particular shrine in which Concha had invested the "capital of her supplications" was as yet vacant, and she went towards it with a greedy stride, hardly waiting to admonish her companions to return home quickly.

Deonys was free. She laid a hand on her small escort, and led her away, nothing loth, behind the ragged screen and out once more into the kindly sunlight.

"See, Pepita," she said, opening her hand and showing a small heap of coins, "I have

all this to spend yet; and you must come back with me to the flower market. Quick, for we must be home before Concha."

Pepita, awed by the audacity of the scheme, trotted silently beside her young mistress, and opened her black eyes to their widest at the reckless purchases that were now made. Di had no time for bargaining, but she was hard to please. The great juicy water-pears and melons, the bunches of green and purple grapes must be perfect of their kind; and nothing would serve her but the rarest and costliest flowers brought all the way from Seville—heliotropes, late roses, carnations, and everything that was sweet and pleasant to look upon.

The store of silver was all spent and the baskets laden, nothing was left except an *ochavito* or [illegible] for the beggars, when they left the market for the second time. Di usually extended her walk to the palace. In the formal gardens near it, some little fair-haired English children were always to be seen at this hour. They were friends of hers, but to-day she had no superfluous leisure to spare. She was walking quickly, choosing the quietest and nearest streets, when she almost ran against some one coming the other way, coming deliberately and lazily, as if nothing in the world were worth hasting for—not even the chance

of meeting this bright, young girl, who was English, too.

"Don't knock me down, please, Di," said Malleson, in a meek voice.

"What! You?" She paused, and looked up astonished. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Ralph; but surely something wonderful must have happened that one should meet you at this hour."

"Give me that basket. You people who pride yourselves on any particular virtue are always anxious to keep the whole merit and glory to yourselves. Why should I be looked on as having done something so very extraordinary, when for once I choose to make myself uncomfortable?"

"But it is extraordinary," she persisted, though she smiled, "because, you know, you are dreadfully lazy."

"I don't know it."

"Oh, I wouldn't deny it, if I were you. You confessed to it this moment, when you said it made you uncomfortable to be out at this hour. Have they come?" she demanded eagerly, as a new possibility struck her. Of course they had arrived, and he was on his way to meet them.

"If they had come you wouldn't have had the pleasure of my company," he answered, with much fervour.

"You wouldn't have had any time to spare for me, I suppose," she said, lifting up her chin. "Well, I don't understand it. And the father, too, he was dressing when I left the house; and that is why I am in such a hurry to get home. I think you are both going to turn over a new leaf."

Malleson made a private note of this bit of information. That Mr. Ouvry should voluntarily rise at six o'clock in the morning was extraordinary, if you like, and was, one might say, a remarkable exhibition of the strength of an old attachment; but aloud he replied, in that aggrieved voice of his—

"I told you so. Here are we all practising our company manners, even before the company arrives. There is one comforting thought, one may always be asleep when the train comes in. Virtue deserves a reward."

"Not at all," said Di, with delightful imperiousness. "Don't suppose anything of the kind. You are going to the station, you and the padre, both of you, and you're coming home to breakfast with us now, so that you may not escape."

"My inner man yields a willing consent to the last part of the scheme. As for the rest—"

"As for the rest, you will go when the time comes," she said, nodding at him. "Besides, I

want you to do ever so many things for me. Concha got the keys of the rooms last night; and Pepita has scrubbed all the floors. You see, we have not been quite idle; but I want you to show me the English way of hanging curtains and arranging furniture."

"Well, you shall have the benefit of my valuable advice on one condition; and I was in England last spring, so, of course, I am to be relied on for the very latest fashions. I am the final authority."

"I am Sir Oracle," she quoted saucily. "Well, your conditions?"

"That every single grape on these bunches, and every rose in all this great basket be devoted to the fair Philippa. She wears roses, I know; and I have a fancy that her liking for sweet things extends to grapes and pears."

They had reached the house now, and Di turned round rather indignantly—

"Of course," she said, "I meant them all for her and Mrs. Henshaw. Do you think we have forgotten how to be hospitable, or that we have grown so very selfish? You shall carry them to their rooms yourself; the door is open."

She led the way into an apartment on the first floor, similar in size and arrangement to that she occupied above with her father. The warm sunlight coming in at uncurtained win-

dows had dried the newly-washed floors, and the blocks of red and black marble already felt hot to the touch. Some furniture was heaped in a confused mass in the middle of the room she entered, and, as he followed her, he noticed with sudden disapproval one or two of her own more treasured possessions among it He set down the basket on the middle of the table, and looked slowly about him.

"Yes, we can soon adapt this room to the most conservative British taste," he said, "with a little alteration here and there."

"Tell me what to get," she said, leaning her elbows on the table, and looking at him seriously. "If there is anything wanted that we have, I'll get it in a minute."

"Oh no, I should rather say there were some superfluous things. That little easy chair, for instance, will hardly suit Mrs. Henshaw's ample proportions; and as for Miss Henshaw, I know her ideal in seats. I have one in my mind at this moment that will suit her exactly. I can order it to be sent as I go home. Suppose I carry this one upstairs again?"

"It's my own little chair. The most comfortable we have," she explained.

"Well, if I carry it up it will help to dispose of this chaos, wont it?"

He laid hands as he spoke on a little low

armchair, which Di usually occupied. He had seen her seated in it often by the window. He remembered the occasion of its being presented long ago, on one of her birthdays; he had suggested the gift, though her father had bought it. It had a dark blue cover, against which he had often thought her cream white tints were well relieved; he did not choose that Philippa Henshaw's complexion should have the same advantage.

"Very well," she said, reluctantly, looking rather disappointed. I asked Concha to carry it down because I thought the room looked so bare and empty with only this ugly sofa and these stiff, gilded chairs."

"Mrs. Henshaw would refuse to occupy any room that had not gilded chairs," he answered, gravely. "You appealed to my superior knowledge, remember. I must decline the responsibility if you leave those footstools about, Di, and this embroidery; we mustn't risk having our taste called in question. You have no bright flowers in crewels, have you, or a group of Isaac and Rebecca at the well, or the Dresden Madonna in Berlin wool-work? Not even a parrot or a cat in beads?"

"You know I haven't," she answered, perplexed and crest-fallen. "You know every one of my things, you gave them to me yourself,

almost all of them. I thought they would make the room look better, and not as formal as if it were set out for a *tertulia*, and now you are taking away every one of the things I brought down with me. I chose out the very prettiest and best. I can't understand it."

"Ah, but we are in a puerile state of culture, here in the south. When I was in England, I had my eyes opened to many things. We must follow what dim lights are granted to us, and avoid the risk of being disgraced."

"A parrot in bead-work would be hideous, I think," she answered, following him reluctantly, as he shouldered the chair, and stooped to pick up the footstools.

"Your saurians of an unknown period would be voted still more hideous, I'm afraid," he said, glancing with a smile at the strange monsters unclassified by any geologist, that were worked in curious device on the draperies she carried.

"Well, I shall always think my embroidery beautiful, whatever any one may say," she answered, stroking the old faded gold and harmoniously blended colours of the quaint designs. My beasts are better than your cats and parrots, at any rate. And there are always the flowers," she added, brightening [illegible] as her eye fell on the baskets in the middle of the table. "Every one must love flowers."

"I don't know," he answered, with grave doubt in his voice. "It is some months since I had that glimmer of light, and culture grows at a tremendous pace, as you will soon find out. Still, I think we may venture on the flowers."

"Oh, now, you are laughing," she exclaimed. "Have you been making fun of me all this time?"

But whether he had been laughing at her or not, it was soon evident that Maileson was not content till he had removed everything that belonged by right to Di (it need hardly be told that Mr. Ouvry had not been called on to contribute anything), and had restored it to its accustomed place. The low chair was again wheeled to the window, the curtain draped in the right folds behind it, the stool placed ready for the little feet to rest on, the rugs and embroideries, the knickknacks, and *bric-à-brac* all replaced in their old positions.

While he was thus occupied, Di had disappeared behind the tapestry that divided her little alcove from the larger room. She came back in a moment without her hat, her cheeks rosy, and her eyes bright with pleasure. At the same moment Mr. Ouvry entered by another door. She went up to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"What a good, kind padre to give me such a

nice surprise," she said; "and was it for that you got up so early; and how did you get to the market without my seeing you? It was very clever of you, you dear old father."

"My dear child, I really don't know," Mr. Ouvry began, blandly accepting the caress—"I really don't know what you are talking about."

"Why, the basket of flowers and fruit!" she said. "Didn't you send them in?"

"I can't take any undeserved merit in the matter." He shook his head. "I saw them in your room, and I thought you had bought them in anticipation of our—a—guests' arrival; and a very pretty little attention it is."

"Then I know who did it, and why some body got up so early."

She went up to Malleson, who was busy adjusting a picture to his liking.

"I thank you very much," she said; "but indeed I meant every one of those others for her. I should not have kept any for myself."

"When there are two young ladies under one roof," said Malleson, carefully examining the set of the picture with his head on one side, "I always consider it a good plan to make them exactly equal; and as you were not likely to make yourself a present, I had to see that you were not left out. Is that picture quite even, do

you think? My eye seems to tell me it inclines a trifle to the right."

"I don't know—yes, it is quite straight," she said hastily. Then she added in a low voice, "I shouldn't have been jealous, and I do wish she had had the best. Yours are far finer than mine, both the flowers and the fruit, and I know, of course, you must care for her the most——"

Mr. Ouvry, who was manipulating a cigarette, smiled covertly at this little speech.

"Oh, of course," said Malleson, with great gravity, "that is why I am taking such immense pains to please her. Will you give me some breakfast, Di, and then I can go and get that chair I spoke of."

Breakfast was rather a solemn meal; there was little talk. Di sipped her coffee but she only played with the food on her plate. Malleson alone exhibited an excellent appetite, and helped himself liberally to fried sardines and omelet. Mr. Ouvry was at no time a breakfast-eater, and the earliness of the hour deprived him of what small inclination he possessed; his every attitude was a protest against the folly of early rising. His pale eyes wandered restlessly about the room.

"So you have brought back the chairs and tables you meant to appropriate to our friends?"

he said, bringing his glances back to his daughter's face.

"Yes, father, because——"

"Yes, yes," he said, airily setting aside her explanations with one hand, "I quite understand; and I agree with you. As a matter of delicate feeling, we must not put our friends under a sense of obligation; we must do as we would be done by. A feeling of tact is a very womanly quality; it pleases me that you encourage it."

"But it was not my doing," said Di, flushing and a little vexed. "Ralph says people are not used to such things in England. You know you did, Ralph, and that they would think them old fashioned or in bad taste."

"My tastes may be old fashioned, I admit," said Mr. Ouvry, with mild patience; "but bad?"

"Only from the lady's point of view," Malleson struck in hastily.

"I am willing to own there may be a difference of opinion."

"But of course our opinion is the right one," said Malleson, smiling at Deonys. "Why should you despoil your rooms—a picture is a greater loss than a friend; we can supply the element of prettiness at a lesser cost than that. If you will allow me, I'll send in one or

two things to trim up the room a little. Women like those small attentions, and I think I can hit Mrs. Henshaw's fancy in the matter of ornaments."

"Certainly, certainly, a very good plan. I have the highest esteem for the ladies, and every desire to make them comfortable," said Mr. Ouvry, crossing one leg and folding his hands. "It's just what I should have proposed myself; it's a more delicate way, you understand."

"I know a very decent fellow who will supply the articles reasonably," said Ralph, who understood very well indeed.

"Then I leave it to you." He dismissed the subject gracefully. "But, my dear boy, it's my affair, you know; you will oblige me by instructing the person you speak of to send in his bill to me."

"As you like," Malleson answered, rising and pushing back his chair; "and when I come back, Di, we shall convert the sala into an English boudoir."

Was there ever a drearier farce, he thought to himself as he crossed the hot Puerta del Sol. He had promised himself an amusing comedy, and already, before one of the actors had arrived, he was growing weary of it all. He had undertaken to order quarters for his cousin at the

Hôtel de Paris. That was quickly done. Chester had a fair appetite for luxury and a long purse to satisfy it. The front suite of rooms on the first floor with the velvet furniture and gilded clocks and the teeming life of the square, as seen from the windows, would abundantly meet his desires. The selecting of the furniture that was to supply the picturesque element in Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room was a matter that required more pondering. He had at one time made a study of Philippa Henshaw's fancies, and it amused him for the moment to gratify them.

The account, which he duly ordered to be made in Mr. Ouvry's name, was a very trifling one representing tastes of the most modest order; it did not include the pink wax candles, straight-backed chair (Philippa always sat on a low chair with an upright back), or little table with a sloping desk for a novel, and drooping bag of silk to hold a bit of work. Why did he buy those things? He could hardly himself have answered that question. Not out of love for Philippa who would use them. That fire—never of the most ardent—had died out long ago, but from its ashes there had sprung a half-tolerant, half-kindly liking, less easily quenched, that rendered the bestowing of gifts on her in its way a pleasure. He was besides instinctively

generous; and behind and beneath all these reasons was the consciousness of making Di happy, and to make Di happy was to do a good day's work.

Left alone, Deonys did not at once bestir herself to her task of arranging the rooms. It had somehow lost its zest. She sat still at her place at table, thinking a little wistfully how well Ralph knew just what Miss Henshaw would like best; and what a pity, what a sad fatality it would be if, in the meantime, she had given her affection to this other young man who was coming with her, and who had naturally many more opportunities of making himself pleasant to her. For by this time Di, woman-like, had made up her mind that, despite his philosophy, Ralph Malleson had not escaped the universal destiny. Invested with this new character of lover and moreover, of unsuccessful lover, he took a new and pensive interest in her eyes. Her pity of him was abruptly silenced by her father's voice.

"Di," he said, beginning to pace the room, "I should like you to be very attentive to our friends."

"Of course, padre." She looked up rather surprised.

Mr. Ouvry, usually the personification of graceful repose, looked an awkward enough

figure threading the narrow space between the crowded furniture.

"You can't think how nice it will be for me to have some one of my own age to talk to," she said, seeing he did not speak. "I've never had a girl friend before; that is, if Miss Henshaw cares to be my friend, of course."

"It is hardly my fault that you have been so friendless."

"I never dreamt of blaming you, father," she said, with tender reproach in her voice, "it is nobody's fault. One can't make English people live here against their will. I only meant to show you that even for my own sake I must be good to her."

"I've no doubt you'll find all the pleasure you anticipate in her society. I'm told she's a very charming young lady indeed. Still, my child, youthful friendships are proverbially rash, and it is as well to be cautious—not to go too fast, you know."

"But I thought you liked Mrs. Henshaw so much," said Di, innocently. This antique piece of advice, which sounded like a maxim extracted from some musty book, was disturbing to her. "I thought you knew her when you were young. It is not as if they were strangers."

"There was an intimacy between the families

at one time undoubtedly, but you forget the lapse of years."

One would have said there was a shade of irritation in his voice, if so bland a gentleman could be irritated.

"Mrs. Henshaw, if I remember her character, will prefer to renew the acquaintance without much reference to the past. There have been changes and troubles in both our lives, and a delicate and sensitive mind shrinks from recalling its sufferings."

"But I couldn't talk to her about the past, even if I wished," said Di, looking at him with honest perplexity and desire to understand. "I don't know anything about her life, or yours when you knew her," she added softly.

"No, no; why should you know?" he said hastily. "Sad memories are for those of us who are old; but you, my child, you have the future all before you."

"But you are happy too, padre?"

"Happy? Yes, yes, I have many satisfactions. I have known trouble, but one does not suffer always."

"I would have shared the trouble too, if you had let me," she said wistfully. "One doesn't want to be thought only fit to live in the sunshine."

"Your own troubles will begin soon enough,"

he said, with again a touch of sharpness. "If I have spared you mine, it has been from wise motives, which you will perhaps understand one day."

She did not speak for a moment, and then she said—

"I haven't vexed you with any questions, have I, papa?"

"No; you have been a good child—a good daughter," he said, with some real tenderness.

"Of course there are things I have wanted to know—about mamma, for instance; every girl must want to know about her mother, but I have tried not to be troublesome. But I will ask one thing now. Did Mrs. Henshaw know mamma?"

"She knew your poor mother," he answered, softly. "I may say she knew her better than any one else."

"And you feared that she might talk to me about her?"

"Feared, Deonys?" he said, with melancholy reproach, "what should I fear but your pain? Was I wrong in crediting you with my own sensitive shrinking from the reopening of an old wound?"

"I don't mean that, father; I don't think I can explain what I meant." His words somehow grated on her, and left a feeling of unreality. "It

wouldn't be pain to me," she was thinking, and then she was suddenly ashamed. How much he must have loved her mother, since he had laid that silence of years upon himself!

"But about Mrs. Henshaw," she said. "As you have told me nothing at all about her, she will not be hurt if I keep always to everyday things, will she? Because one must talk about something."

She spoke without ironical intention, anxious only to guard against a too rough handling of the lady's very fine feelings.

"Far be it from me to fetter your speech, my child," said Mr. Ouvry, with an air of being most honourable and generous. "As for my life, it is open to you; my affairs are yours to discuss as you will. If I venture to hint that Mrs. Henshaw—excellent creature—is perhaps a trifle too frank and confiding (shall I say indiscreet), in her conversation, it was only to remark that it seems to me wisest and kindest to discourage any little confidences she may choose to make. There are times when they become embarrassing."

"I think you mean that I am not to ask any questions," she said, going straight to the point through all his beating about the bush. There was a hurt ring in her low voice that she strove for the moment vainly to control. She was

entirely honest herself, and she did not understand the necessity for diplomacy.

"I only spoke of my own intentions," he put in mildly. "I don't control you; do as you like. You will find it a little tiresome, perhaps," he smiled pleasantly, "but I have warned you."

"Then I will take your words, as if they were meant for me. I shouldn't have been curious, I think. No, papa, you might have trusted me. Do you think because we are so happy now that I have not guessed you suffered once? Do you think I have forgotten that mamma is dead?"

She said the last words almost in a whisper, as if she shrank from touching an old sore. Was it any wonder that in her innocence, with an ever urgent sense of her own loss in her mind, she should come back to the old belief that this was the sorrow he hinted at?—this the past experience he shr[illegible] from having discussed?

Mr. Ouvry, at the other end of the room, knocked down a book that lay on a little table near his elbow. It was a clumsy action and unlike him. He stooped slowly to pick it up and replace it carefully; then he turned and came to her. He stood behind her chair; she felt his hand resting on the back.

"My child," he said, "you have guessed rightly. I have had my days of suffering. I have borne them, I hope, in a proper spirit—let all that pass. I have tried to make you happy, Di, and to keep all knowledge of my troubles, my past troubles, from you; and in return it is not too much, is it, to ask for your sympathy? I refuse to believe that you willingly misunderstand me."

An appeal like this was sure to touch her, and he knew it. She had risen in a minute, and put her arms about him impulsively.

"Dearest padre," she said, "don't let us talk of sad things any more—of misunderstandings—as if we two could quarrel! I shall begin to hate these people, and to think Ralph is right, if it makes us cross and uncomfortable even to talk about them. As for Mrs. Henshaw, who cares less than I do about the foolish things she may say? Do you think I would let her say anything about you that wasn't nice? There, let me see you smile, padre." She threw back her head and looked at him bravely, though there were tears in her eyes. "And I promise to be the very discreetest, wisest and most prudent of daughters."

He would have been hard indeed who could have withstood this appealing. Mr. Ouvry was not hard; he was very fond of her in his way;

he could not, perhaps, help it that his disposition was "tepid" and his range of feeling narrow. He loved her as well, perhaps, as he knew how to love anything beyond himself. His face recovered its blandness; and his "God bless you, my child," was almost fervent. It comforted Di, though she could not quite recover the old gaiety.

Malleson found her an hour later gravely arranging the roses. He sat down on a corner of the table and watched her lazily. He knew, after the first glance at her downcast face, that something had disturbed her.

"What is it, Di?" he asked, looking at her earnestly.

"Nothing," she said quickly, not answering his look.

He watched her in silence for a minute or two, and then he got up and began to push about the chairs, as if to get rid of some superfluous energy. In five minutes the room was transformed. The man arrived with the articles he had chosen; but by this time his little spring of interest had run dry.

"Put them anywhere," he said impatiently, as the messenger paused awkwardly [illegible] orders. "Push them into any odd corner; take them back with you if you like." He turned away.

"What a pretty little table!" said Di. "Oh, put it here, please, by the window. The room looks very nice now, don't you think? It only wants some books. I wonder what kind of books Miss Henshaw likes?"

"Miss Henshaw will supply her own intellectual food," he said, almost savagely. "Her appetite is not discriminating; we need hardly trouble ourselves to cater for it. If you want to go to the station," he said, more gently, "it is time to get ready."

"I am not going," she said, lingering to put some last finishing touches to the room, "I shall wait here. Will you tell papa, please, if it is time?"

Mr. Ouvry was to be allowed to get over the first painful allusions without a witness.

She had meant to go, and he knew it; but when he would have asked the reason of this change of plan, something checked the words on his lips.

"All right," he said carelessly. "It is very hot; you are wise to stay at home."

"Yes, it is hot," she acquiesced.

(They tacitly agreed to accept the heat as a sufficient argument.)

Left alone, she paced the rooms a little restlessly, seeking a relief from her bewildered thoughts.

Involuntarily—for she was an order-loving little woman—she straightened a fold here, and picked up a mote there, while she was fighting against the first faint shadow of distrust, the instinctive dislike of a truthful nature to anything of a mystery. The consciousness that there was a vague something she must not ask about, must not even think about, weighed on her heavily. Yet she strove to be true to the letter of her promise. By-and-by she went to her own little nest behind the tapestry hanging. What tremulous prayers may not have risen there, what simple, loyal petitions for her father's safe-keeping from more sorrow, what entreaties that old wounds might be healed!

She was, for the first time, face to face with a new possibility from which she shrank—the possibility that doubt, distrust, estrangement, might creep into the life that had been as yet so open and unclouded. All the impulses of her nature went out towards more love, more tenderness. The saddest thing in the whole wide world seemed the loss or the lessening of these.

Ten minutes—a quarter of an hour later, Concha, going about her work, heard her young mistress singing. Di was hanging over the balcony, looking eagerly down on the shifting

crowd, watching for the first glimpse of the coming guests.

She had put on her white dress. A string of gold beads about her throat caught the sunlight.

CHAPTER IV.

Pol. "What do you hear, my lord?"
Ham. "Words, words, words."

YET when they came, when she saw them descend from the cab, she felt her cheeks grow hot. A sudden shyness took possession of her; she would have liked to run away. Instead, she went downstairs without more ado, went slowly, and yet quickly enough to be there waiting for them—a sedate and slender figure standing out white in the dimness of the lower passage.

Ralph Malleson was the first to notice her. Perhaps he had been looking for her. He touched her father on the arm. Mr. Ouvry looked round sharply.

"Ah, Deonys," he said. "Yes, come forward, my child; let me introduce you to my old friend and your friend from to-day, I hope. Mrs. Henshaw, allow me to present my daughter to you."

Di felt herself overshadowed by a tall figure, which stooped and kissed her; the kiss was so careless that it alighted somewhere near her ear. The lady was swathed in a gauze travelling veil; and Di, looking up with shy eyes, could not distinguish any features.

"Odd now, wasn't it, that I should never have known till to-day that you had a daughter? I call it very singular, very singular indeed. And quite a big girl, too!"

This was said by the lady as it might seem almost in a tone of reproof.

"Di has done growing," said Malleson gravely. "We have given up hoping for further riches."

"What a pity! It is a great disadvantage to be short."

The speaker did not herself suffer from this drawback. She had a large voice and a large presence. She filled up the doorway so that the others were not seen.

"Would you mind counting the boxes," she said, addressing no one in particular. "Six of them; six large ones. Blake will tell you how many small parcels there ought to be. This summer in Switzerland, we lost our most valuable piece of luggage, all through the carelessness of the coachman, I am persuaded. Such ignorant people, and so obstinate, the Swiss! Ah, here

is Mr. Malleson, always obliging! *Now* I feel safe."

"If you will allow me I will show you the way upstairs," said Malleson, accepting the compliment and offering his arm. "Mr. Ouvry and Felix will see to the luggage."

"Oh, certainly. Why I am standing here I am sure I don't know, for I am half dead with fatigue, except that I fancied there must be a stair leading down to some dark place in front of me, and if there is anything I dread it is a cellar-stair. A tempting of Providence, I call it. Dear Lady Brand, you know, they say she will never walk again without a crutch. Philippa will be sure to fall down; she is so rash, dear child."

"Not at all, mamma," said a clear ringing voice, that startled Di by its nearness; "I am as prudent as you. I am only waiting for a guide."

"Let me help you." Di stepped forward and put out her hand timidly. "I am quite used to the darkness, and there is no staircase; you need [illegible]ve no fear."

"There's a delightful air of mystery a[illegible] it," said Philippa. "I feel that we are in[illegible]n at [illegible]t." She felt the gentle touch, and [illegible]ping the little brown hand in her own, suffered herself to be led to the light.

Mr. Ouvry and Felix followed almost im[illegible]

diately; and then there was a dragging up and down of boxes, so many voices calling and arranging, and such disjointed talk, that Di was too bewildered to allow of any keenness of impression. She remembered afterwards that when they reached the large sun-flooded room, all scented with the faint sweet breath of roses, Philippa had stooped, taking both her hands in her own, and had said in that odd, clear voice of hers—

"We don't need anybody to introduce us, do we? We know each other already, I think. I am Philippa, and you are—— May I call you by your pretty name?"

She remembered, too, that she had never answered. She had forgotten when she looked into the beautiful, soft face so near her own that she was expected to make any reply. Somehow, it seemed as if the greeting was just what it ought to be, that Philippa could not have spoken in another tone or used other words; but that she could be so pretty Di had hardly dreamed. It was a flower-like face, pink and white, the brave colour coming and going almost with every breath. And the eyes—homes of sunny laughter, blue as the summer sky outside—eyes to witch the heart of a man. Was it a wonderful thing that Philippa should have many lovers? She kept gazing at her,

even when Philippa had tossed off her hat and had turned away from her, daintily helping herself to grapes. She followed her with her eyes through all the fragmentary talk that was going on, though a sentence here and there reached her, and might at another time have touched a sensitive place.

"I really never expected a daughter, I assure you. I can't think why you never mentioned it when you wrote. And so like the mother! I declare I felt quite ill." This from Mrs. Henshaw. Then, a moment later, the same voice raised again above the others:

"The rooms are rather pokey; but what can you look for? As I tell Philippa, we can't expect to carry our own elegant home with us everywhere; and, after all, it is the people, not the place, that make the home." This with a sentimental droop of the voice.

Mr. Malleson, who was addressed, bowed with a fine gravity.

"Of course, everything is shockingly arranged. I always remark that in lodging-houses the furniture is arranged to give it the most repulsive appearance; but with your good taste, Mr. Malleson, and with our dear Mr. Chester to guide us, we shall soon correct that little fault."

"Di's attention was now arrested, and she

looked across at Malleson, while a demure smile curled the corners of her mouth. Mrs. Henshaw caught that fugitive glance, and it did not pass unrecorded. For a few moments her thoughts were not pleasantly busy; for some unaccountable reason she seemed to resent Di's existence.

The conversation now dwindled into a plaintive monologue on the lady's part. The other speakers became hearers. There was a something about Mrs. Henshaw that compelled your unwilling attention. She had been very handsome as a young woman, and was so still; but even if this had not been the case you would always have had to look at her before you looked at any one else. There are some women who insist on this, and who gain their end by a thousand little artifices which they practise almost unconsciously. Mrs. Henshaw was not accomplished in *finesse*; she simply talked; she addressed no one in particular, and thus secured many listeners. She disliked draughts of air and cats and mice, she suffered from cold feet, she had a weakness for wearing a little shawl about her shoulders. These small idiosyncracies and a thousand other personal particulars, whole armies of likes and dislikes, of feelings and fancies, she was ready to marshall before you. Her secrets you were liberally invited to

share. You became her confidant whatever your disposition towards the office.

Before she had completed the history of her journey, her sufferings at this point, her relief at the other, the gentlemen had all manifested an unaccountable desire to slink away. Ralph began to remember that he had a certain amount of "copy" to supply before evening. Mr. Ouvry reminded Deonys that the travellers must be sorely in want of rest and refreshment, and that it was thoughtless of her to deprive them of it by her presence. Felix Chester murmured something about his "traps" being very much in the way—in fact, blocking up the lobby.

"Yes," said Philippa, in her clear young voice, before any one else could speak, "we are all tired, every one of us. One gets tired from so many different causes. I, for one, am tired of being quiet so long. And besides, mamma is only waiting till you all go away to eat some grapes."

"Philippa, I beg—on what authority——"

"Yes, mamma dear," said the irrepressible young lady, meekly, "I do happen to know my authority for once—for a wonder. It was Lord Byron, wasn't it, who said that women should never be seen eating? But one does not take Lord Byron seriously nowadays, does

one, Mr. Malleson? And he can't ever have been so thirsty as I am."

She held up the empty stalk of a grape cluster and looked at them all; her lips breaking into a smile as if she were a penitent who felt assured of pardon beforehand. She had fastened a rose at her throat, and she looked so pretty that her mocking pertness was too lightly forgiven.

And then she was not pert at all, but very tender and almost grave when she went up to Deonys, and asked her in a whisper if she would come and sit with her later in the evening.

"No, let me come to you instead, if I may," she added hastily. "That would be much better, if you don't mind."

Mrs. Henshaw had again launched on the full tide of talk, and the others were echoing her vagrant sentiments like a Greek chorus.

Yes, it was fortunate the weather was so much cooler. She would like the climate, no doubt. A night's rest, that was what she wanted. They were all unanimous on this point, and grew quite animated over it.

Under cover of this volume of sound Di found courage to make her reply very eager. "Do come; in the evening is the best time, for I shall be quite alone. I shall like it so much."

"Then it is a promise," said Philippa gaily. "Here is my seal to it." She stooped her tall head and kissed the blushing face held up to her.

As she turned to go, Di suddenly encountered Mr. Chester's glance. It was frank and pleasant and, a little amused. She had not thought of looking at him before, all her attention having been given to Philippa, and now she felt some surprise. He was not what she had expected him to be. Then she had a sudden suspicion that he was laughing at her, and her cheeks grew hot. Philippa had noticed the look too. She put up her chin and pouted.

"You seem to be amused," she said, with a touch of defiance.

"Forgive me," he answered gravely, but still with the laugh in his eyes. "I felt interested, and, if you will allow me to say so, envious."

"I know what you think about women's friendships." She glanced at him over her shoulder.

"And you value my opinion about as much as you did that of Byron a moment ago. It is unkind of you to give Miss Ouvry so bad an impression of my wisdom."

"Oh, she shall find you out for herself! I promise not to prejudice her one way or another," she answered, with the sudden smile

that was one of her many charms. "I am not the one to disturb another's faith in human nature. There! wasn't that exactly like one of mamma's speeches! I think you had better go, Mr. Chester, for I am growing quite moral."

Felix and his cousin crossed the square together. Felix put his hand on the other's shoulder. There was an old and strong attachment between the cousins, but as they were both Anglo-Saxons they did their best to repress any manifestations of it. Felix, who was an impulsive young fellow, managed less ably than the other.

"Well?" said Ralph briefly.

"Well," Felix echoed affectionately, "you are just the same old man, as Bohemian as ever."

"I would have ordered a new suit from London if you had given one longer warning," said Ralph, glancing sarcastically at the perfectly dressed traveller keeping step with him.

"A man wouldn't be likely to ask you the address of your bootmaker, I must admit," said Felix, looking down at his own neat toes with a smile.

"What did you come for?" Ralph asked, ignoring this remark. He was used to the liberties taken by this young man.

"Suppose it was to see you."

"We'll dispense with that little fiction," said Ralph politely. "I should rather have asked what did they bring you for?"

"That question must be approached with diffidence. Perhaps they thought I was a nice young man; perhaps they had an eye to the tickets and the custom-house officers and the luggage, where one of my sex comes in useful, as Mrs. Henshaw was kind enough to assure me. Here we are, at any rate, and you may as well make the best of us. I hope they can give a fellow some dinner, without keeping him starving for an hour or two. I've had nothing since we left Burgos."

"There are your rooms," said Ralph, leading the way. "I dare say they can give you something at once, if you don't care to wait for *table d'hôte*."

He pursued his inquiries no further. If there had been anything to tell, Felix would have told it all in the first breath. There was evidently nothing of urgent importance to tell.

"The rooms will do capitally," said Felix, looking round him, ready to be pleased with everything. "Neat, but not gaudy. My appetite for gilded clocks would have been satisfied with one specimen, but as they seem made to be looked at and not to go, it doesn't much matter. You'll stay and dine?"

"Thanks," said Ralph, picking up his stick; "but as this is my hour for going down to the House you can get off cheap. Perhaps you'll ask me the next time at an hour when you know there's a chance of my being able to accept."

"I'll order a special banquet of fish—brain-food, you know." But Ralph made a dignified retreat in the middle of this impertinent speech.

Deonys had, meantime, gone upstairs, feeling a little bewildered, perplexed, and yet pleased. Life promised to take on a new aspect under the guidance of this new girl friend; to possess a zest and flavour it had hitherto lacked. She thought a long time about Philippa, trying to arrange her impressions. She was very glad her father did not come and ask her how she liked these old friends of his, for she was not sure that she liked Mrs. Henshaw at all. It was much easier to be sure that she should like Philippa. But Mr. Ouvry did not come to ask any embarrassing questions. He had gone out to the café or the club; and she had the afternoon silence to do her thinking in. Her mind glanced once or twice at Felix Chester, this man with the happy name and the sunny look. No, he was not at all what she had expected; he was younger, for one thing, less remote than Ralph Malleson, for instance, from her experiences—

younger, brighter, more handsome. In truth he was very handsome in the broad-shouldered, fair-haired, English style of manly good looks. His eyes were of a clear blue—eyes that returned your glance kindly and with a great frankness, a frankness without limitation. His teeth were white and even; he showed them when he smiled, and his smile came readily. His clothes were always just what they ought to be. He was gentlemanly without thinking much about it; and if there was in his whole air and bearing a hint of taking the world very lightly and cheerfully, you felt that it was easily pardonable in the owner of a substantial bank account.

Something in this fashion he presented himself to Deonys as she sat alone pondering over these new acquaintances. To this pleasant picture there was added the vivid interest of his being the possible and very probable, lover of Philippa Henshaw. Over that high and sacred mystery—the love of lovers—her imagination hovered timidly. Already Philippa's interests were becoming her own; Philippa's supposed pangs and tremors, doubts and waverings, were born anew in her. Why else should her heart feel heavy, when she remembered her old, life-long friend, Ralph Malleson? And yet—and yet, was it not very good, supremely good to be young?

Downstairs Miss Philippa exhibited the self-possession of a young person to whom such questions had long since grown stale. She was wandering about the room, her head thrown back, her hands clasped ever so lightly behind, stopping now and then to give a careless assent to her mother's talk, now and then to examine a picture or piece of furniture and to make her comment on it.

"I know who chose this chair," she said, looking with approving eyes at the low seat in its corner by the window. "Nobody but Mr. Malleson could have guessed my fancy for a straight back; and it is just my colour, too. I call that a charming attention."

"Nonsense, Philippa!" Mrs. Henshaw spoke with a tinge of unwonted sharpness. "You are always imagining things, child. Mr. Malleson had nothing to do with the ordering of the furniture. If he had, I am sure he would have remembered to get an American rocking-chair for me. He was always so kind in studying my little whims. That chair must belong to the house, and an uglier suite I am sure I never saw!"

Philippa hummed a snatch of a song, but she made no reply. One day later, when they were for a moment alone, she took occasion to thank Mr. Malleson very prettily for the attention she

found so charming. She had by that time discovered the uses of the table as well, and established her right to both.

Mrs. Henshaw having to her own satisfaction proved Philippa to be in the wrong, grew once more good-natured. She wore a loose morning-gown, and rested on a sofa, sipping chocolate. Her talk was curiously varied. When the English maid who had travelled with them, came into the room to display some dress that had suffered detriment on the journey, or to ask for orders, her remarks became general; when the silent Blake had withdrawn, they lapsed once more into personalities. Towards Blake —who knew everything that concerned her mistress—she practised discretion; but where was the use of being discreet to Philippa?

"Really, Mr. Malleson is very much improved," she said on one of these occasions. "I always thought there was something aristocratic about his nose; and did you ever notice how small his hands and feet are?"

"No," said Philippa, pausing before a blue vase that had one or two of th[illegible]ville roses. "What would be the use of discovering any good points in a plain and poor Mr. Malleson? If I remember rightly, we used to consider him very ordinary looking."

"You are so difficult to please, Philippa.

Now I always thought there was something very nice and refined about his expression; and nobody could for a moment fail to perceive that he is a gentleman. You will bear me out that I always said that of him, though he did go about rather shabbily dressed. But then, you know, when one's position is assured one can afford to do that."

"I see," said Philippa, with extreme simplicity, "that is why our clothes are so expensive. How clever you are to discover all these things, mamma; and how very stupid I must have been, for, of course, the heir to a baronetcy must have been good looking, and I even imagined his feet were clumsy! I dare say it was his boots. A baronet may wear bad boots as well as shabby clothes, mayn't he, especially if he has an aristocratic nose?"

Philippa's eyes were bright with audacious fun, but her mother was hardly listening.

"I didn't congratulate him," she said. "I must take a quieter opportunity. He is just a little difficult—don't you think?"

"If you mean difficult to congratulate, yes. It would seem a sort of impertinence to wish such a knight of a sorrowful countenance joy. I believe it to be a little fiction of Mr. Chester's."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Henshaw sharply. "You saw the notice of his grandfather's death

in the newspapers, and you wouldn't surely have him so unfeeling as to look pleased over such a melancholy event. I'm sure," she added in the next breath, with feminine inconsistence, "it is a good thing the elder brother died. They say he was terribly dissipated."

"So that one may dispense with the pretence of regret in his case," said Philippa, under her breath. She was in an unwonted mood of mocking bitterness. For the moment she saw things as they were; usually imagination came to her aid, but to-day illusions failed her.

"Of course this fancy of his cousin's that he will not take the title, must be a mistake. If he does not marry it will lapse, and that would never do. I wonder what fortune goes with it?"

"What a pity there isn't a directory to give one something more than people's names and addresses, and the number of their houses. How useful it would be, and how [illegible]thumbed," said the young lady carelessly.

"One might find out something about the family in Debrett. Go and ask Blake for it, child. How very well Sir Ralph Ma[illegible]on sounds!"

"Lady Malleson sounds very well, too. Why don't you say it, mamma?"

"Really, Philippa, you are quite indelicate!

Of course, one must wish the poor young man to marry; but he is not at all likely to think of you, if that is what you mean, after the way you have behaved."

"Not at all likely; we are quite agreed on that point," said Philippa, calmly, intent on draping a curtain to her mind. "But still my idea of a directory is an excellent one. What plain sailing it would be, and how safe one would feel! Only, we might all grow a little stupid if we had no more discoveries to make about each other."

"I am sure I don't know what you mean. It is such bad taste to talk in that mystifying way!" Mrs. Henshaw's beautiful daughter was often a puzzle to her mother.

"Don't you, mamma? Then here is a specimen: Felix Chester, young, handsome, and wealthy. Inclined to matrimony, and on the outlook for a charming wife. A most fascinating youth; possibly a trifle fickle; but then so rich! Ralph Malleson—we can hardly fill in the sketch till we know the worth of the title. Philippa Henshaw—oh, she is easily described. A young woman of no family in particular, and with no fortune but her face. Anxious to make the best bargain possible. On view. None but solid, eligible young men need apply."

Mrs. Henshaw listened aghast. She regarded the tall, supple figure with severe displeasure. The glance was lost on Philippa, whose face was towards the moving crowd outside.

"I am ashamed of you!" she cried. "I really think you are growing quite coarse and vulgar." She was honestly rather shocked: she made the same distinction that we most of us do between our thoughts and our spoken words. Philippa's mind might travel where it chose—one could not curb its wanderings—but that she should speak of such things!

"Perhaps it is vulgar,"—the girl spoke in a subdued voice—"but the truth often is vulgar."

"I thought I had trained you to be a lady. I am sure I have spent enough on your education; but you have none of my natural refinement of character."

Philippa listened in silence to the motherly lecture. Mrs. Henshaw took the opportunity of airing other grievances at the same time; but the girl's mind lingered on one point. She could have told, if she chose, who it was that first taught her the value to set on her beauty; the end she was to gain by means of it. But then she had accepted the teaching; she had practised the lessons; the time for reproaches was past. She had a lingering, dusky sense of honour, this proud girl, and often held her

peace when hot words tempted her. She woke out of her reflections to hear her mother say—

"I don't wonder Mr. Levison gave you up, if you talked to him like that."

"Mr. Levison,"—she smiled a little—"I did not talk much to him."

"It is all clear to me now. I am the most unfortunate of mothers," Mrs. Henshaw continued plaintively. "I have sacrificed home and friends, and all my comforts, to save you from the gossip of that affair, and you requite me by talking like this the very first day!"

"Pardon me, mamma," said Philippa gravely; "but I think you never quite understood 'that affair,' as you call it. I had the honour of declining Mr. Levison's hand, not he mine. I could not have married any one who was so ugly. It would have suggested such unpleasant comparisons, and one didn't wish his feelings to be hurt. To be sure, he dressed perfectly; but then he couldn't very well have gone about in old clothes, since he had no blue blood to shine through his shabbiness."

"I didn't think of such things when I married your poor papa," said Mrs. Henshaw, reprovingly; "no one would call him good-looking, poor man (I am thankful you take after me, child). But then I always had a strong sense of duty."

"I am afraid I don't inherit it. Perhaps papa's artistic instincts have descended to me instead. He had the good taste to prefer beauty, at any rate."

Mrs. Henshaw had a dim sense that there was a lurking compliment wrapped up in this remark, but she could not feel sure. Philippa had such an odd way of saying things, and it was very unpleasant when you couldn't tell what a person meant.

"I do love truth," she was wont to say. "You can't speak too plainly, so long as you are honest; that mystifying way that people have nowadays is really so ill-bred." She was beginning a second little lecture to this effect when Blake entered, desiring to know whether her mistress wished an evening dress left out. Her attention was readily diverted into this new channel. Whether to dress on the chance of visitors, or to deny herself, and accept comfort instead in the shape of her dressing-gown, her novel, and the sofa, became the question of the moment.

"Do you think any one will come to-night, love?"

"If you mean will Mr. Chester come or Mr. Malleson, I think not. We are expected to be very tired."

"Well, of course, I am dreadfully worn out;

I have not your strength. Still, you know, one must not always think of oneself; and if any one should come——"

Philippa left the room, not caring to know the final decision. She had her own plans for the spending of the evening, and she began to look towards the hour when she might join Di as towards a refuge.

She shut herself up in her own bedroom. It was a bare little place, in spite of Di's attempts to make it cheerful and homelike; but she cared nothing for its bareness. It was her own, and she could lock herself in and cease from any strife of tongues.

She walked once or twice up and down the narrow length of carpet. Here, then, in this strange land, she was to —— Well, what was she to do? She went to the mirror; she leaned her two elbows on the table, making a frame of her hands for her chin and her dimpled cheeks. She looked at herself gravely, almost heavily. There were times, as now, when she hated and grudged her beauty. She liked to believe that but for this fatal gift she would never have been betrayed into untrue and misleading ways, as if ugliness had a monopoly of virtue.

"I wish I had been plain like you, you poor, dear, unloved, despised papa," she said, gathering her straight brows into a frown, "and then

perhaps there would have been some little chance of my being good. Plain-looking people are always good; they have no temptations, I suppose."

CHAPTER V.

"O life! how pleasant is thy morning!"

"O gioventu! Primavera della vita."

It was a pretty picture on which her eyes rested an hour or two later. Deonys stood by the French window which was wide open, one hand grasping the folds of the curtain and holding them back. The balcony was freed from its awning; the light, transparent and golden, touched her hands and her dress; wings were fluttering all about her, flashing, bronze, blue, snow-white in the slanting sun-rays; one bold bird had alighted on her wrist and was feeding out of her open palm; she was chiding it, coaxing the others, talking soft and low in the liquid Spanish as familiar to her as her own tongue. One moment the red feet clasped the iron bar of the railing; the next, a sudden panic set the airy wings again in motion, arching, wheeling about her head with a soft, whirring

sound, closing only to spread themselves and fan the air anew.

Philippa stood in the doorway, and looked at it all. Her thoughts flew to Venice. She saw again the Campanile, rosy with the last sunlight; the dream church—a "jewel heap" of rare colour and form—the home and haunt of a hundred privileged pensioners, to whom its sacred places are no mystery. She too, after the fashion of other English girls, had fed the saucy pigeons in the great Venice square. She had done other things in Venice that she could remember with less unmingled pleasure. She thought of Hilda, the lonely and austere maiden in her gaunt, old tower that aspires to reach the blue Roman sky. Hilda is there no longer, and her doves have flown elsewhere.

"They have come to you; they take you for their lost mistress, wise creatures," she said, dancing up with a smile.

Di turned with her slow, shy look of pleasure to welcome her. The startled birds took flight.

"Never mind: they will come back again, the foolish, frightened things. Sit down here," she said, drawing forward her own little chair. "It is cool now; I think this is the pleasantest hour of all the day."

"No, you must sit there,"—Philippa pulled her down with gentle force—"and I here, on

the stool at your feet. It is the penitent's place; and I've a strong suspicion that I've been wicked this afternoon."

Di smiled as she obeyed. There was no malice in the beautiful, dark-fringed eyes—a little wistful, as it happened, at the moment—into which her own were looking.

"I am so glad you came," she said simply; "I thought you might be too tired, or find things to do."

"I am never tired—never. We are old travellers, you know, and soon shake into our corners. Besides, good old Blake is invaluable."

"Who is Blake?" Di asked, wishing to understand everything.

"Mamma calls her our lady's maid—it sounds better—but she is really a maid-of-all-work. Why she stays with us, I'm sure I don't know, except that I think she has a lingering scrap of liking for me. She was my nurse when I was small."

"Like my Concha. It is nice to have an old friend, a woman friend like that about one. Only you have your mother."

Di stopped abruptly. Any allusion to her own loss seemed like an approach to that debatable ground that had been labelled dangerous. Already she began to feel the fetter of her promise."

"I have my mother," Philippa echoed, with a little laugh. "Do you envy me that privilege?"

"Yes," said Deonys, very low. She hesitated and then said slowly, "I mean I wish I had mine."

"Then I wish you had," Philippa said impulsively. "If you cared for each other that would make everything easy; when the caring is absent things become complicated, you understand. What wouldn't I give to have one great, strong liking for anything or any one!" She clasped her hands behind her head and looked absently in front of her. "There would be some hope of my reformation, then!"

"Dont talk like that," said Di, a little puzzled and a little pained; "it is all nonsense."

"Which is all nonsense? my indifference, or my reformation?"

"Your indifference, of course. You are not indifferent; that, at least, is not true."

"Truest truth," said Philippa, with a great appearance of earnestness. "A heart was forgotten when I was made. I have something that does duty for it, I believe—a blood-pump, isn't it? But what sentiment I was once capable of has long since been used up. I could have cared for my father, I think, if he had lived. I was called after him, you know, and

t is why I submit with so good grace to my y name. Poor old dad! It was the only ng that was ever done to please him."

"You loved him; you must love others. I'd you to care for me a little." Di put out hand and touched the fine hair that the sun s shining on.

"Don't care for me too much." Philippa shook er head. "I am a disappointment to everybody who does. And yet, why shouldn't you?" she broke off gaily. "I like to be loved."

"I love you now. I think I must always care for you, whatever happens."

Deonys said it out of the warm impulse of an irresistible friendliness. It was her first friendship. Her affection was pure and undissipated; it had not been exhausted on a score of school-companions, or diluted on reams of paper. Long afterwards, when a mist of tears had risen between her and this beautiful, brilliant face, she remembered her words and was glad she had been faithful to them.

"Now let us talk of other things," said Philippa, with a touch of impatience. "Yourself, for instance."

"I have no history," Di said, after some serious pondering.

Philippa laughed at her solemn tones.

"I have," she said significantly. "Ah, a

nice little history; but I am not going to you mine, not I. I am going to ask you questions. I want to know where you got your odd, pretty name from. Is it Spanish?"

"Oh no"—Di smiled—"it is as English as yours. Papa found it in an old baptism register in a little village in Essex, I believe, and he liked it. It was repeated often in the old book, spelt differently, but always the same name."

"In Essex, you said?"

"Yes; have you been there? Mamma came from there, I think," said Di, with a touch of eagerness.

"No," said Philippa carelessly; "I've never been there. Look here, I am going to call you Di, as your father does. Be thankful you have a name that can be shortened. Nobody ever discovered an abbreviation for mine that wasn't hideous. Somebody once proposed Phyllis; but it was a case of playing it to his Corydon, and I would have none of it," she said, with a mischievous smile. "Mr. Malleson was right; you may take away a syllable, but you only add to its ugliness."

"Then you knew him very well?" Di asked a little curiously. This, at least, was not forbidden ground.

"We knew him—yes, as well as most people.

But I dare say you have discovered before this that he is a very mysterious gentleman."

"Mysterious?" said Di, laughing. "Why, I've known him all my life."

"But he lived half his life before we were born, my dear. They say he was dreadfully wild in his youth, and was cut off with the proverbial shilling, like the heroes of novels. He has been living on that shilling ever since."

"I don't believe it!" said Di indignantly; "people will say anything."

"I think myself it's that air of reserve he has that gave rise to all the rumours about him. If people are mysterious, the world always puts a bad construction on their silence. I dare say they have provided him with as many skeletons as one cupboard will hold."

"I think they had better let him alone."

"I found out the wisdom of that long ago," said Philippa, shaking her head. "Once I was foolish enough to fancy I could understand him, but I soon discovered it was all the other way." There was just a touch of bitterness that did not escape the listener. "Sometimes I used to think those quiet eyes of his read us through and through. I wonder what he told you about us; tell me, Di!" she urged, entertaining this new idea eagerly. "Tell me, quick!"

"But it wouldn't be right." Di looked very

uncomfortable; she had not acquired the art of gilding unpalatable facts. "There are some things he said that would please you."

"And some things that would not please me!" Philippa laughed. "I know him; he has a genius for saying uncomfortable things."

"However he may talk, he is all that is good and kind," Di said earnestly. "You say you saw him often; but I have known him all my life; he is my dearest friend."

She was impelled to defend him. She could not understand Philippa. Was he not more than a friend to her once?

"And this dearest friend warned you against me? Di, my child, you must learn to hide your blushes and those honest eyes of yours if you would conceal anything from me; they are traitors and betray you. Now I will tell you something to console you. I like this Mr. Malleson—this kind and true Mr. Malleson—a little more, perhaps, certainly not less, because he told you I was a wicked girl and a dangerous friend. He is honest, at least; and that is what we do not all aspire to be."

"But he didn't talk like that!" Di cried eagerly. "If he grumbled a little—and you know how men grumble—it was because he was cross, or tired, or hot. The hot weather spoils

everybody's temper; even the padre gets cross sometimes. And, oh, surely you know Ralph better than to mistrust him."

"Oh, I bear him no grudge," said Philippa lightly. "It takes a good deal more than that to destroy my friendship for a man; and we were friends once. I like men best. I know it isn't good taste to say so, but it is true; and wasn't I upholding the truth a minute ago? Of course, men have their weaknesses, but their virtues are more magnificent than ours. And so I like them best (you always excepted, Di); and I'll forgive this particular one that he doesn't like me. Isn't that magnanimous?"

Di was spared a reply by the entrance of Concha, who ushered in the solemn Blake and introduced her in dumb show, with that shade of contempt for her ignorance of Castilian speech which is essentially a "thing of Spain."

"What is it, Blake?" Philippa looked up with a laugh. "Can't you make these barbarians understand you? What's the Spanish for hot water, Di; I know that is what she wants. It's a most important phrase, if you look at its place in the conversational guide-books; its almost as useful as 'My sisters will have some medlars,' and 'Thou wouldst have some mutton.'"

Blake looked severe disapproval on this levity.

"It's Mr. Chester, Miss Philippa," she said, "and your mamma wants you to come down-stairs."

"Oh, but I'm not coming." She gave her answer with rapid decision. "Tell mamma—anything you like, but say I can't come. Now, you dear, good woman, don't look so reproachful. See here, my hair, my dress, too; you know you wouldn't let me appear in this old gown."

"But, Miss Philippa——"

"But, Blake——" She jumped up and went over coaxingly to the old woman. "I've made up my mind, and you know what that means. I find it more amusing, ever so much more aumsing, to stay here than to sit downstairs and join Mr. Chester in listening to mamma."

She had her way, as she generally had; and, after a little further urging, Blake withdrew.

"There, Di!" she exclaimed, going back to her footstool. "After the confession I made a moment ago, isn't this an immense proof of my regard for you?"

"I am glad you should like to stay with me; but——"

"But you disapprove of me all the same?"

"If your mother wanted you—and one's guest——"

"One's guest is sacred? But I see this particular guest very often, and if he comes pre-

vited? I know what you mean." She put her hand up, and very softly touched the lips that would have bravely given utterance to the truths her heart prompted. She rose and went behind Di's chair, leaning over it. "Di," she said, and her voice took a new vibration and was almost sad in its intonation, "it is quite true what Mr. Malleson said, or implied, if he didn't say it in so many words: I am not a good friend for you. I have lived in—oh, you could not guess what an atmosphere. Never mind all that now. I tell you I am not good, not like you, but I wouldn't hurt you, I think. And when I come here, if I may come, it will be because some instinct tells me it is a safe and sheltered place. I abhor sentiment, and all this sounds very sentimental, but once for all I may say it, and trust you will understand."

Di put up her arms and drew the beautiful face down, till cheek rested against cheek. Did she not understand?

"Come often, as often as you will," she said; "but don't say such hard things of yourself. I won't believe you when you talk like that." Then, with quick intuition, guessing at the revulsion of feeling that was sure to follow this rare betrayal, she said cheerfully, "Now, you must stay and have supper with me. The

father and Ralph have gone to a meeting at which Castelar is to speak, and they will be late, for that, you know, is a thing not on any account to be missed."

"Castelar?" said Philippa, still keeping her post behind the other's chair, but speaking lightly. "Will you think me quite a Vandal if I tell you that 'Castelar' conveys nothing to me at all? Who, or what is Castelar?"

Di laughed.

"Ask Ralph," she said; "he calls him the most eloquent of living men. And, indeed, his words are beautiful--like music. He makes the dullest matter seem full of interest, till you wonder you could ever have thought it dry or tiresome. Some day we shall get an order from one of the Legations for the Cortes and go to hear him."

"Oh, politics! I'm afraid the subject, in Spain, at least, is too lofty for me. At home I call myself a Liberal, I don't know why, except that it seems to fit in with our ways better than the more aristocratic Conservative, for if we are anything at all we are not Conservative—my good mamma and I; we are ready to blow round with any wind that promises to favour us. But now, Di, I will tell you what provokes me very much, and it is this: whenever I proclaim my political creed I find some one ready

to say very smilingly and politely, 'Oh, you ladies, say what you will, you are all of you the truest Conservatives at heart.' Do you know what it is to be pulled up suddenly with a general formula like that? As if women were made exactly alike, and had but one size and pattern of mind!"

Philippa's cheeks were blushing yet. She spoke just for mere speaking's sake, out of a desire to banish her last words from her own and her companion's mind.

"No," said Di laughing, as she moved about the room, and made deft preparations for supper. "This time it is I who am stupid and ignorant. Your Liberal and Conservative are equally a puzzle to me. Here I learn a little because I hear the father and Ralph talking."

"Tell me what it is the right thing to believe, then."

"Oh, there are innumerable parties, but——," she lifted her head with a little proud movement —"but I am for the king."

"Then I'll be for the king, too! He is young and nice looking, isn't he?"

"They treat him shamefully," said Di hotly; "but you will soon see all that for yourself. And you must get Ralph to explain about the different parties; he laughs at my mistakes."

"But he allows you to pick up what crumbs

of wisdom you may chance to catch as they fall from his lips. Oh, this good, kind Mr. Malleson!" said Philippa, with that half-mocking ripple of laughter that no one was able to resist, "he is just like other men. They always want the large web of cloth out of which to shape their opinions; the shreds and corners that are left over after the process we are made welcome to, and they laugh at the patchwork we fashion out of these rags. This is one of the few faults I find in men, you will notice; and I tell you, Di, if we were women of spirit it is a thing that would make us angry."

"But in the meantime," said Di gravely, "we are only two hungry girls, and here is the omelet."

"And the omelet is an irresistible argument," she answered, going up to inspect it. "Goodbye to our grievances for a little. Oh, how good it smells! Do you know, I have chatted myself into quite a savage hunger!"

"Come, then, and eat."

They sat down at a little table placed near the window. The lamp was lighted, but the curtains were not yet drawn; the night air wandered in laden with a refreshing coolness. The stars were as yet few and faint in the wan sky, but in the plaza beneath them, and in the

many streets that branch off from it, there was a net-work of golden points growing every moment brighter as the twilight fled before the fast-coming darkness.

"I think this is the very best time to see the Puerta del Sol," said Di—"by gaslight. I have seen it once with a full moon shining on it, and that was even more beautiful. The lamps were out and there was no one abroad except our Seréno. One might have thought it an enchanted city in fairyland, and Domingo the prince grown old and grey in his wanderings."

"Ah! the gaslight and the people for me!" said Philippa. "The more people the better. I could not live in the country, and especially not in the English country. I feel my spirits rise whenever I leave that bleak, austere island of ours. I should not break my heart if I were never to see it again."

This seemed to Di a sort of treason.

"I have never been there," she said; "but it is the dream of my life to go."

"Ah! don't go," said Philippa gently. "You are, what you are—just because you were never there."

"But you? You are English. I might take the risk, I think."

"I am a citizen of the world," said Philippa gravely. "To have been born here

or there does not make you one thing or another——"

"Unless you happen to have been born in Scotland," Di interrupted, with a twinkle of fun in her eyes; "that settles your opinions for ever. I have a Scotch cousin."

"I haven't, though I have been in the north as I have been everywhere else. My experiences came to me in so many different lands"—— she broke off hastily. "Shall I tell you a little about our life, Di?"

"Yes," said Di. She had a suspicion that the recital might pain her, yet she could not refuse to hear it. But for the moment it seemed Philippa had a mind to linger about the outside of her experiences; that inner record which, after all, moulds our visible actions she had the grace to veil. Doubtless she felt that there were many things about her past that the young girl sitting opposite to her would fail to interpret as she had taught herself to interpret them. One does not become a citizen of the world without paying for the privilege. And the price? Suppose it were the fine bloom of girlish guilelessness; the exquisite sensitiveness of youth; the quick vi[illegible]tion of a conscience uneasy at a hint of trespass? Suppose it were these and other things besides?

In whatever way Philippa had [illegible]ined for

her knowledge, she imparted it to-night very gracefully, and with the charm she could quickly weave about any subject when she chose. She was extremely familiar with certain phases of continental life; from an English point of view she knew it thoroughly. She had kept her eyes open, and they were eyes that saw quickly and clearly. She described with certain touches of fun and quaint humour that took her listener captive. Di forgot the faint sense of disapproval that had troubled her before in this new friend's talk, while she wandered in her company through sunny France, or golden Italy; looked with her eyes at the stainless Swiss snows, or into the sombre depths of solemn Norwegian fiords. Philippa had been everywhere, it would seem. What a large, full, varied life hers had been.

"Then you won't care for our Spain," she said wistfully. She had been thinking over and planning this and that that was to be shown to her guests, and now—they would care for none of these things. "You have seen so much you will find nothing new here."

"I have found you!"

Philippa rose, and bending over Di, kissed her lightly. At this moment she was her most charming, gentle self. It was just then, when Di's wavering allegiance had come back stronger

than before, that Mr. Cuvry made his appearance. He came in quietly and surprised the two girls, who made a pretty picture. Philippa murmuring absurd and caressing little nothings as she leant over the chair in which Di sat, blushing, laughing, remonstrating, more girlishly gay than he had ever seen his daughter before.

He looked, for so dignified a gentleman, agreeably influenced by the spectacle.

Di's face, which had suddenly grown wistful when she saw him, brightened again under this glance. She had all at once remembered that little caution about the too quick cementing of youthful friendships—remembered it late. But her father's face showed no disapproval; his tone was bland as he said:

"Don't let me disturb you, young ladies. Miss Henshaw, you have taken compassion on my little girl. You must allow me to say with what pleasure I see you under my roof."

"I think it is Di who has taken compassion on me." She went up to him, speaking with a pretty air of deference. "I couldn't help coming. I am afraid I must come very often indeed, if you do not forbid it." She looked up into his face with a frank smile, as if discrediting this possibility.

"My dear young lady, you are most welcome at all hours. You cannot come too often to

please Deonys or me. For your mother's sake, I should have said yesterday, now, with your leave, I say for your own."

This gracious speech Philippa answered with her prettiest smiles. There were those who said Mr. Ouvry was cold and unimpressionable; but he was human enough to be pleased with this charming homage.

"And all this time, you poor papa, nobody is thinking of your supper," said Di, who had been making quiet little arrangements for his comfort while the compliments were passing.

"I have had all I require, my child. Ralph and I went to the café after the meeting was over."

"And why didn't Ralph come back with you?"

"He guessed that I should be here," said Philippa.

"That would have been reason the more for his coming," said Mr. Ouvry gallantly; "but the fact is he had work to do. Our good friend takes his work very seriously. He hopes to pay his respects to Mrs. Henshaw to-morrow."

"Mamma will be very kind to him," said the young lady frankly. "I know she is longing to see him."

"He will certainly call. If it isn't too late, I should like to perform that pleasant duty now.

You will perhaps spare Di a few more minutes while I am absent?"

"I will stay gladly," Philippa answered. "Mamma is quite alone." She had long before this noticed Felix Chester cross the square on his way back to the hotel.

Mrs. Henshaw was alone, and sufficiently tired of her own company to accord him a welcome. They talked for a little while on indifferent matters, skirting carefully any allusion to the past about which Di, in her timid fancy, supposed them always to hover. The gentleman was polite as ever; the lady not less anxious to seize the moment for those little confidences she was apt to make; but to a subtle ear there was a faint something in all their talk that seemed to suggest a hidden understanding. "We know each other; we two have seen into each other's souls. Still we are people of the world; let us be very polite, and feign ignorance of those little matters in which we had once a mutual interest."

Mr. Ouvry had indeed a word to utter that appeared to him more important than the reiterated hopes that the ladies should feel comfortable, or repeated and vague offers of friendly help. But he could wait; he had great faith in waiting.

His opportunity came to him in one of Mrs. Henshaw's inconsequent speeches.

"My daughter seems to have taken a great fancy to yours," she said, with a slight shade of pique, almost as if she would suggest that Di was taking a liberty in allowing herself to be liked. "I must prepare, of course, to be quite neglected. She is a well-grown girl, I must say, and rather pretty, if she knew how to dress; perhaps not quite in my Philippa's style, but then think what I have spent on that child! A handsome fortune, I assure you."

"Miss Philippa was worth the expenditure of a fortune, and the result is perfect," he answered graciously. "As for my daughter, she has had few advantages; but, it is a good child, a good child."

"I am sure I don't doubt it," said Mrs. Henshaw indifferently, the talk having ceased to be personal. "But that look of her mother would make me sadly anxious. It really is an extraordinary resemblance; a most unfortunate likeness."

"I never speak to Deonys of the past," said Mr. Ouvry, with slow emphasis.

"I should suppose not."

He passed by this interruption, as if it had been unheard.

"It is my wish that the child should not be told anything relating to her mother's or my married life. She inherits my sensitive tem-

perament, and—a—she would suffer for my sake."

"You were very unhappy, then?" She looked at him curiously.

"I make no complaint. The past is past. I have no wish to recall it. Nor do I wish Deonys to be troubled with any knowledge of it. I should hold it an unfriendly act in any one who should infringe this wish—this strong wish of mine."

"Dear me!" she broke in, with a touch of asperity, "one would think you were afraid of *my* talking to her about Mary! I am not so fond of dwelling on people who turn out such deceptions. Ingratitude and deceit are things I really cannot pardon; and after the way Mary behaved!"

"Your indignation is just," said Mr. Ouvry, with dignity. "Pardon me if, in dwelling on my own troubles, I for a moment seemed to forget yours. I have forgotten nothing. Who would be less likely than you to recall willingly a part of your life that must have been so painful to you?"

"Well, well," said Mrs. Henshaw, anxious to slip easily away from a topic that made her uncomfortable, "I am sure I am not likely to talk to the girl about her mother; and I only hope she won't turn out like Mary, though I

should be very anxious if I were you. Here is my Philippa at last. Philippa, you dear, naughty child, where have you hidden yourself all evening? And our poor Mr. Chester here too, so attentive and delightful, and going away at last quite disconsolate because I said I was really too tired to talk to him any longer."

"I was very pleasantly employed." Philippa glanced with a smile at Mr. Ouvry. "Perhaps Mr. Chester wouldn't have been so amusing if I had been here."

"I am sure you must be tired too. It is thoughtless of me to detain you." Mr. Ouvry rose and took his leave gracefully. Nobody could have guessed that he had just spoken words charged with hidden meaning, or that his visit had been paid from any other motive than that of common civility.

Philippa looked intently at her mother when he had left; but Mrs. Henshaw was yawning and taking off her bracelets.

"It's a good thing I dressed after all," she said; "but I am as tired as possible. Tell Blake to come to me, child."

CHAPTER VI.

> "If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it
> To the last article."

About this time Ralph Malleson developed a surprising energy in the matter of early rising. He laid great stress on the heat and on the comparative coolness of those early hours in which the sun shines with a tempered vigour. Yet it had been hotter. Those brief weeks of *[illegible]no* which follow on the heels of the long Spanish *invierno*, had counted out their last moments, and he had found it possible to slumber throughout the allotted hours without undue discomfort. But then, there is no such great virtue in getting up when you can count on pleasant society; and during those fresh, late September mornings two young girls were certain to be discovered in one part or another of the leafy Prado.

Philippa, unlike most fashionable ladies, was

her brightest self in the mornings, more gay than any of the birds that sang so bravely the last poor remnant of summer's full song among the rustling leaves above her head. There was a something unconventional and exceptional about her that formed her chief charm. At these times the little touches of cynicism and of hardness that too often flavoured her talk were wholly absent. She was happy and natural, and her vivacity, her laughter, her beautiful looks all appealed forcibly to Di's sympathies. There was nothing she would not have done for this new friend.

A day or two after Mrs. Henshaw's arrival, the girls had taken the first of those morning walks that afterwards grew into a habit with both. They were resting on one of the many seats that line the long avenue, and Philippa was twining together some flowers she had bought at a street corner as they came. Di had taken off her hat, and the soft breeze was stirring her hair and ruffling its smoothness. She sat idly watching Philippa's deft fingers as with quick, nice discrimination she blended the colours harmoniously together.

"Why does your mamma always wish I had been a boy?" she asked suddenly.

Philippa opened her eyes and laughed.

"I thought I was used to mamma's conversa-

tional surprises," she said; "but here is a puzzle."

"I mean, why is she so astonished that I should be a girl?" said Di, lazily swinging her hat. "I'd have been a boy if I could. Then I should have worked for the padre; and I'd have been one of your lovers, Philippa."

"The dearest and best of them."

"I'd have been a true sort of lover, I think," said Di seriously and meditatively; "but I shouldn't have said the silly things they say in books."

"Or out of them."

"You've had a great many, I suppose?" Di looked at her with sudden interest.

"Oh, not so very many," said Philippa modestly. "There, child"—she looked critically at a little bouquet she held away from her, while she examined it slowly—"that will suit you, I think; and never, never let me see you wear pink and yellow together again."

"It was some everlastings our old washerwoman brought me," said Di, by way of excuse for this enormity. "She had taken such pains to arrange them, that I didn't like to hurt her feelings by touching them."

"And so you hurt mine instead by wearing them. There, stoop down and let me fasten this in your hair."

"Oh, but, Philippa," she said, as she obeyed and knelt down at the other's feet, "you have left nothing for yourself—nothing but those scraps."

"Wait till you see what I can make of them. You haven't proper faith in my powers yet."

But any further remonstrance died on Di's lips. She started up suddenly, before the flowers could be fastened in the brown braids, and all the warm colour rushed into her cheeks.

"Look," she whispered, "there is the king!"

"I see Mr. Malleson," said Philippa calmly. "I noticed him some time ago."

But Deonys had eyes for no one except Don Amadeo, the simple, young soldier king, who went afoot like the humblest of his subjects, holding his little son by the hand. In a low carriage, drawn at a slow pace by two ponies, the queen was seated, leaning back among the cushions. The sun touched her pale, fine face. Now and then the walkers turned to say a word to her and draw from her an answering smile.

When Philippa's eyes rested on this fair and gracious presence she rose slowly, and all the flowers fell at her feet. The little prince, with a cry of childish delight, ran to pick them up. She bent, and, with a fine tenderness filled the eager hands stretched out to her till they could hold no more. She was smiling and her soft

colour came and went. The little prince laughed; the blossoms kept dropping as he ran back. It was all over in an instant; and, with a smile and a graceful word of thanks, the little procession passed on.

Ralph Malleson, standing a pace or two apart, had watched the little scene. He thought to himself that he had seldom seen anything prettier than the trio made by the two girls and the child. It was a bit of accidental grouping that would have been an inspiration to an artist; as it was, he was no artist, and he kept his admiration to himself. When he joined them Philippa was saying lightly—

"All gone. The little bunch I tied up for you too. Never mind. You can console yourself that they were coveted by a king."

But Deonys was not listening.

"Did you notice those men," she said, turning to Malleson, with all her soul in her eyes—"the cowards! They passed him and that beautiful lady, the queen—passed with their hats on! Oh, he is too good, far too good for them; and the queen, they will kill her with their insults!"

"See what it is to have the honour of reigning over Republican subjects," he answered. "Even Amadeo is not democratic enough to content them. Never mind, Di; at the moment

he had no eyes for those mannerly gentlemen, and so their small triumph missed its mark."

"You are properly loyal, at least," said Philippa, looking at him with her bright smile. "I saw the sweep of your hat even with the corner of my eye."

"I do it to please Di; she is such a fierce Royalist. As for all this bowing and scraping, according to Mr. Herbert Spencer, it is only a relic of barbarism. It's an instinct we have kept hold of since our savage days."

"Is curtseying an instinct, too?

"Curtseying, madam, is a poor reminder of the good old custom of bending the knee before the superior sex."

"Please to notice, then, that I curtsey to you," said Philippa, making a fine sweep.

"What are you two talking about?" said Di, with a shade of impatience. She had been following the carriage with absent eyes, and not listening to their idle badinage.

"I was only acknowledging the inferiority of women," said Philippa meekly. "I hope your Miss Barbara won't hear of it. Di, my child, is it permitted to sit down now?"

"Of course, Philippa; don't be absurd."

"Then, perhaps, you will make a little corner for Mr. Malleson. I have something very serious to say to him."

"Pray say on," said Malleson, accepting the offered seat; "I am all ears."

"Well," said Philippa, with greater gravity than she usually allowed herself to show, "I suppose, to begin with, I must congratulate you. You will expect it. Mamma will, I know; but, then, I am not mamma——"

"Most logically put," said Malleson gravely.

"Philippa, what do you mean?" said Di, laughing. "You are not your mamma—is that what you wanted to tell us?"

"I had such a pretty speech all ready," she answered plaintively; "and now you have put it quite out of my head, both of you, with your frivolous interruptions. I suppose you feel very happy, Mr. Malleson, and will not miss my nicely prepared congratulations?"

"At this moment I feel in a state of perfect felicity. If Di would hand over that umbrella, my bliss would be at a height," he answered, as he opened the sunshade, and held it carefully over the brown head that the sun was shining on. "Put on your hat, naughty child," he said to Di aside.

"Ah, but I mean about your new honours." Philippa spoke a little impatiently. "How slow you are to understand! Does being a baronet make people dull, I wonder?"

"I have known baronets who had a small

amount of intelligence," said Malleson, as if weighing the matter seriously, "and I have known baronets who, strange to say, were quite as stupid as untitled mortals. Never having been one myself, I cannot tell you how it affects the intellect."

"But now—you are one now! " she exclaimed impetuously. "Don't try to deny it! Your cousin told us."

"Chester is a youth of a lively imagination," he said carelessly; "or, perhaps he is deep in State secrets. Have you heard it whispered that 'our special correspondent' is to have a corner in 'Debrett' bestowed on him, Di?"

"I have heard nothing."

"No doubt that is it. The remarkable ability of certain Spanish letters has made an impression in high quarters, and they are taking this neat way of expressing their approval. A baronetcy was the least they could offer, for I dare say you have both of you observed what high honours are showered on literary and scientific aspirants by our enlightened country."

"You are laughing, as usual," said Di severely. "I don't believe there is any truth in this story. I am not going to be afraid of you yet, at any rate. Of course if they want to reward you that would be very nice; but I

think I like you best as you are. Only, Philippa, if there *is* any talk of such a thing, you might have told me," she added reproachfully.

"I wanted it to be a charming surprise for you." Philippa shook her head. "I believed it solemnly; not, of course, that little fiction about rewards. I had pictured the scene: you and I timidly practising the new title, and Mr. Malleson condescendingly overlooking our little lapses and mistakes; and now this stupid Mr. Chester has spoiled it all. It is unpardonable!"

"How interesting that would have been for me!"

They both laughed at her tragic air.

"He has only left out the sequel to the tale, the postscript that contains the cream of the news," said Malleson, speaking with sudden energy. "There are two sturdy little lives between me and the honour he proposed for me. I don't in general appreciate babies; I even own to a horror of small babies, but never were youngsters more heartily welcome or more happy in their moment of arrival."

"Twins?" exclaimed both the girls.

"Twins. Am I not in luck? One lad would have been good, but with two I feel safe. One or other of them is sure to grow up to man's estate. They never both die, do they?"

"No," said Philippa, shaking her head. "There is always one spiteful enough to survive."

"But you don't want them to die, poor little babies!" It was Di who spoke.

"Mr. Malleson is rejoicing that they are born," said Philippa. "What beautiful unselfishness! But you mustn't expect me to reach that sublime height, Di. I did so wish to number a baronet among my friends!"

"I'll introduce you to the elder of the youngsters," said Ralph, smiling at the demure mischief of her face. "If you have any regard for my feelings, you ought to rejoice at my escape. What a target I should have been for the irony of my friends, the owner and wearer of an old title with hardly money enough to procure a decent coat to cover it!"

"But there is the honour—if you knew how much we who never had a grandfather think of a long and honourable descent!"

"Honourable! How do you know it is honourable?" said Ralph fiercely. "Does it make a man virtuous to have a handle to his name? Am I to look up to and reverence a man simply because he has the right to stamp a coronet on his paper? Very likely it was some piece of mean, time-serving policy that won the spurs for us; something I should be

horribly ashamed of if I knew it. Now your great-grandfather——"

"Oh, my great-grandfather!" said Philippa, laughing; "never mind him. I dare say he was excellent in his way; but you can't convince the world that yours wasn't much more deserving of notice."

"Then I suppose the world, of which you know so much, would decline to believe in my gratitude? So be it. All the same, I think it ought to take a substantial shape. What is it that babies, or the mammas of babies, expect in the way of offerings? Lumps of coral, pap-bowls, mugs?"

"Don't count on me. I must go home and prepare mamma's mind for the shock," said Philippa, rising. "I think you had better not call on us to-day, Mr. Malleson. You must give us twenty-four hours to readjust our ideas. Perhaps to-morrow you might venture."

"Oh, Philippa, don't go home just yet," said Di naïvely. "Come with me to the Carrera de S. Geronima. Do you remember that jeweller's shop we looked into yesterday? I saw such pretty cases of forks and spoons there. Your sister-in-law would like that for her babies, wouldn't she?" She turned to Ralph.

Of course they went, in spite of Philippa's protest against deserting to the enemy, and

they spent a happy half hour among the jeweller's treasures of gold and silver.

As they walked he told them a little about his brother's marriage; but not that it had been kept a secret from him till the end when as usual, Roderick had shifted his burdens on to those other willing shoulders.

"Poor old Rod met his wife in India, you know; but he hardly lived to see the youngsters. She brought them to this country after her widowhood."

"Was that why you went home in spring?" Di asked, wondering that Ralph had told her nothing of this before.

He nodded. He did not tell them how little he had been prepared for the summons to welcome these new and unknown relations, whom Roderick had left to his care. Another man might have found the situation to be somewhat ironical; but he was either too unambitious or too indolent to care.

"It was a romantic affair," he said; and he told them some particulars of the meeting with whimsical amusement.

"What was she like?" Di asked, with great sympathy.

"Poor little soul! she was drowned in crape and tears," he said, smiling. "I never got beneath the trappings to the real woman at all.

There isn't much of her, I should say, but what there is seems wholly good. Poor old Rod always liked your clinging, submissive woman."

"I wonder we never heard of her before," said Philippa, with a touch of sharpness. "Do you know, it seems to me very odd that you should have hidden her away like that. Mamma would have been so pleased to befriend her. It would have been such an excellent mission to console the widow of one baronet and the mother of another," she said, with an irrepressibly mischievous smile. "And you never came near us."

"I was wholly taken up in baby cult," he said. "My sister-in-law seemed to think I never could have enough of caressing those two white bundles; and what between my desire of pleasing her and my fear of dropping them, or letting their heads fall off, or breaking their fingers, I assure you I had a hot time of it."

"It was odd that Mr. Chester didn't tell us," said Philippa, still occupied with her wonder.

"Prince Alasnam is a wise young man, but he doesn't know everything," he answered carelessly. "Here is your shop, Di; but don't ruin me altogether."

"But you mustn't be impatient, Ralph," said Di, whose whole sympathy had been enlisted for the widow and her boys. What cared she

that, as the world would say, he had missed his chance in life? "I think you had better buy a newspaper."

"Is it such a serious affair as that?" he said, smiling at her grave face.

It was indeed a very serious affair. Never were gifts more carefully pondered; never did decision seem so difficult. Malleson, who had surrendered the matter to her, watched her over the top of his newspaper with an amused smile, as she stood in grave hesitation before a long row of mugs and spoons spread out on the counter.

Philippa, though always ready to answer any appeal made to her taste, was flitting here and there, peeping at the flashing diamonds and the snow-white pearls relieved against the warm velvet on which they lay. She liked to look at the shining stones; she seemed to have something in common with the brilliancy and colour of the sapphires and emeralds; but she would have liked just as much to linger in a hot-house full of rare blossoms. She had no desire to possess any of this wealth. She had no personal vanity. Her dress, though better made, was as simple as Di's, and was without ornament of any kind. This entire unaffectedness pleased Malleson when he spared a moment to notice it. She could not be un-

conscious of her rare beauty, but the knowledge had ceased to influence her actions which were always perfectly unstudied. She met him with great frankness, without coquetry, without reproach for his withdrawn admiration. If at times her knowledge of his keen insight troubled her, she never showed it.

She seemed to take almost the same pleasure that he did in watching Di's earnest profile: the grave, flexible, child-like mouth, the downcast, long-lashed eyes bent in serious consideration. Once her glance met Malleson's and they exchanged a mutual smile, a look of sympathy and understanding that did something to scatter doubts on his part and cement their old-new friendship. From that time there was a new gentleness in all the looks and words she addressed to Deonys; it was as if in that glance she had read his secret, the secret he was so slow to discover for himself.

"What, not chosen yet?" she said, going up and laying her hands lightly on the other girl's shoulders. "Why, little one, the baby does not deserve to be born who would not feel proud of that fork and spoon."

"Yes, I think they will do," said Di, with a small sigh of satisfaction. "Look, they are exactly alike; and here is a place for their names, unless they have each a great many."

That was a pleasant morning, and it lingered in Malleson's memory. He thought of it often during the day, when he was busying himself over that "copy" that kept the British public enlightened as to Spanish affairs. If his political visions were for the moment tinged with rose-colour, it is to be pardoned him, for often while he wrote he remembered how Di had looked an hour or so before, and what she had said.

He had told her, what he had not told to Philippa, how an old estrangement had widened into a breach, that could not be crossed, and how his grandfather had died a little while ago unreconciled.

"But you have forgiven him—since he is dead?" she asked.

"There are some things one is not called on to forgive," he answered, with so dark a look on his face that she asked no more. "He thought himself in the right; he would have thought my forgiveness, if I had extended it to him, an unbounded piece of impertinence; and, I dare say, I should have met any overtures on his part much in the same manner." He smiled a little bitterly. "Di, I wish you to forget all this. If Mrs. Henshaw had not kindly busied herself with my affairs, you should never have heard a syllable of it."

"I will forget it, if you are sure it has not vexed you?"

"Vexed me? No. Have you no faith in my disinterestedness?"

"Oh, you mean about the babies! Of course I am very glad about them. You would not have made a nice baronet"--she looked at him seriously.—"and it would have changed everything. If they want to reward you, I hope they will think of some other way."

He had answered fervently that he hoped "they" would; and as he would probably be offered, when the time came, a great choice of rewards, he could consult her wishes about them.

But though he laughed he was earnest enough in thinking he had made a great escape. Never was man who cared less for honours or distinctions of any kind, who hugged his insignificance more complacently, and yet it pleased him hugely that this girl with the grave eyes should agree with him, should consent to his love of comfortable obscurity. This calling up of what was past in his life was most distasteful to him. He had chosen to renounce any portion he might have in it long ago, to bury his own boyhood, as it were, and to begin a new life upon its grave. He wanted no resurrection of his dead hopes and aspirations.

The new life suited him; he was content. But he had escaped; those little lives had come between him and worry, if nothing more, between him and a hateful revival of an old skeleton. And Deonys had congratulated him. The child had a fine sympathy, a quick womanly discernment.

So he scribbled and dreamed, and his letters that day had a lightness of fancy they did not often wear, and were touched with his own rare happiness. What excellent reviews some loquacious travellers might have received, had it been their good fortune to come under his eye while this rosy mood lasted.

Felix Chester never joined in these early walks. He had a great many ways of enjoying himself, but this was not one of them. Such visits as he paid to Mrs. Henshaw—and they were frequent—he paid in the evening. Deonys heard his fresh laughter sometimes as she leaned over the balcony. Once or twice she distinguished Philippa's tones, airy and light, crossing Mrs. Henshaw's monotonous monologue.

This solitary watch on the balcony was a little lonely sometimes, a little more lonely, perhaps, than it used to be before she had known the exquisite pleasure of companionship.

Mr. Ouvry generally absented himself in the

evenings. His constitution required the bracing of a little society after the restraint of an afternoon passed in sleep, which he also declared to be necessary to his well-being. Di fostered both fancies with a tender regard, and was used to combat with much energy his elaborate but faint protest at leaving her. If you had asked her she would have told you he was the most unselfish of men. He was a member of the Athenæum. She would very likely have added that the other members of that august institution could in no wise have spent an evening without him.

Mr. Malleson always listened to this assertion in respectful silence, but he was ready enough to take advantage of her faith in her father's popularity to share her solitude. He was so old in her eyes, and so long and of such distant date the friend of the house, that there seemed nothing more simple and natural than that he should come, and that she should welcome him. Indeed, she never reasoned on the matter at all. The knowledge that a little rubbing shoulders with society very soon teaches, had fortunately been denied her. He used fervently to hope that she would long be deprived of it. He prized this fine quality of simplicity above most things. So it was that she only looked up and smiled when he came to her on the

evening of that day, when they had together provided silver spoons for the babies born to this fortune; looked up and smiled, and went on with the trifling bit of work she held in her hand, and was pretending to be very busy over.

"Do you know," she said, as if their talk had been but a moment interrupted, "I've been thinking over all the things you said to me that afternoon a week ago, out there on the balcony, and I feel sure that you must have been very cross."

"As that," he answered, out of the depths of his armchair, "seems to be my normal condition, no doubt you are right."

"No." She shook her head. "You are often lazy, and you laugh at me sometimes, but that is to be expected. But you are not often cross; I must do you that justice. You are not as growlsome as some men I know; but that night you were more than cross—you were unjust."

"And now I am to be punished for it?"

"If confession means punishment, then you are to be punished," she said, speaking gravely, but with a betraying smile round her lips. "You are to acknowledge that you were wrong."

"I always do that when the argument is with a lady," he answered. "My natural politeness suggests that course; and I find it

generally makes things pleasant. In what particular way I have offended has escaped my memory, but that is a mere trifle, and quite unimportant. I was wrong, and you, oh, Deonys, as you ever are, were right."

"Ah, but you know very well," she said with much dignity—"you know perfectly well that I was thinking of Philippa. I could not answer you then, though I thought that you were a little cruel; but now I have known her for a whole week."

"I have heard of the rapid growth of a young lady's friendship for another young lady," he answered. "It has even been disrespectfully likened in my hearing to that of a mushroom after a September shower. That, of course, must have applied to friendships a few hours old—juvenile friendships, so to speak. So venerable an attachment as yours——"

"Don't be sarcastic," she interrupted, holding up one finger—"*that* is one of your faults—because I mean every word I say."

"I only meant to hint that any lingering hope of proving myself for once in the right has fled before so overwhelming a proof of your superior knowledge. You have known Miss Philippa for a week, and I don't for an instant question that you have got 'further ben,' as they say in the north, in these eight days than

I have in as many years. That freemasonry you ladies practise is a profound secret to us."

Deonys was too well used to that light way of his, and understood too thoroughly how it was only skin-deep, as it were, to be at all offended by it.

"Yes," she said, "we girls understand each other very quickly; at least, I understand Philippa, for she is the first girl friend I ever had, and I wanted to tell you that every day I love her more."

"That is a usual symptom, and doesn't alarm me. You will go on loving this new friend, and she will go on loving you, till on both sides the fever has reached a climax. I won't venture to predict what will happen after that."

"You predict a relapse, or a chill, or some other ugly conclusion; but you will be wrong again, as you always are," she retorted, with her happy laugh. "I understand Philippa, and to understand her really—herself, you know, and not the ways she puts on—is to love her."

"Then I feel myself safe, for I haven't mastered the first steps yet. I haven't got beyond the 'ways' I suppose, for I don't pretend to understand Miss Philippa. The severity of the study always frightened me."

"I wish you would," she said pleadingly. "I mean, don't turn against her. You are kind

to her, and yet you don't trust her. But indeed you may. I know that her life hasn't been like mine: she has had no Ralph, and no padre to look after her and keep her in order, but she *is* nice. As for her ways, why, we all have our little ways. You have some very dreadful and growlsome ones yourself, as I am always telling you. Now, promise you will be kind to my friend—my very first girl friend."

"I don't believe she will do you much harm," he said, with a smile at her earnestness and her imperiousness. "If those little ways threaten to become alarming, I'll step in, I promise you, in my office of guardian."

"You will have surrendered to them long before that!" she answered gaily.

Now this week that had elapsed since the Henshaws' arrival had revealed to Di one or two other things besides that profound knowledge of Philippa's character, of which she made her little boast. It had convinced her by some mysterious process—call it womanly intuition, or what you will—that Ralph Malleson's love for her new friend had been a quickly dying flame, which had soon burned itself out. There was to be no pain for him in their renewed intercourse. That pleased her. She did not wish him to suffer; yet while she was glad for his sake, she was the next moment full [illegible]

inward reproach against him; for the old regard had regenerated on his part into a kind of light, good-natured distrust, that betrayed itself in every sentence he addressed to Philippa. He was kind and friendly, and yet it was as if he had weighed her and found her wanting, and scarcely cared to hide the discovery from her. Philippa appeared to notice nothing of all this; but Deonys noticed it, and it vexed her. She was, like all young and enthusiastic people, a warm partisan. Philippa's cause was her cause. Hence this little bit of special pleading, while she and Mr. Malleson shared the twilight and the coolness of the September night.

"And why," said Malleson, after a meditative silence, while he watched her fingers twisting and turning the fragment of muslin stuff—"why does Miss Philippa deprive herself so long of your society? This is, let me see, the third night I have found you alone, and always pretending to be immensely busy over that strip of white stuff, that never gets on an inch further."

"Why, it's nearly done!" she said indignantly.

"Oh, is it? I'll swear the needle was in the very same spot two nights ago."

She passed over this insinuation with dignity. She occupied herself with Philippa's defence.

"People need not be always together, though

they care for each other," she said. "And, besides, I have no right to all Philippa's time. I am only her friend."

Just then there came from the apartments below the sound of Felix Chester's wholesome laughter. It broke in on their pause of silence like an enlightening voice.

"And my cousin Felix aspires to be something more?" he said quietly.

"She did not tell me." Deonys looked down at her work. "Even if it is so, I don't suppose she would be likely to tell me about it—so soon."

"There are some secrets that are patent to everybody," he answered carelessly. "I don't pretend to understand Miss Philippa, as I said already, but there are one or two points in her character that even I have mastered. No, Di, don't be afraid. I'm not going to make any unpleasant remarks after that snub I got a little while ago."

"But I don't think you are speaking very pleasantly now. If I were Philippa I wouldn't tell you, at any rate."

"You are an irreverent young per[illegible] Di, and have no proper respect for your guardian. Wait till she imparts the particulars of her latest conquest to us, and you shall see what excellent advice I'll give her."

"She won't like it."

"She won't take it, you mean. But I'll have the satisfaction of airing my wisdom all the same."

"Would it be good for her, if it were true? Would it please you?" she asked anxiously.

"Good for her! She asks if it would be good for her. And what about the unfortunate young man? Who is to be anxious on his behalf? I was Felix's mentor in the days of his youth. When the time for confession arrives it will fall to me to adopt his cause, I can tell you!"

"Oh, but they won't ask you and me," said Di, with a smile. "They will have each other. What will they care what we think?"

CHAPTER VII.

"All I see in you is worthy love."

RALPH MALLESON had not ventured to show himself in Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room since that little discovery touching his supposed heirship had been told her by Philippa. Perhaps he was waiting till the time for condolence should pass. The lady's lively pity, or livelier indignation—she was sure to be indignant, and to insist that she had been deceived—did not present itself to his imagination as an exhibition that was likely to amuse him. He preferred Di's naïve pleasure in his escape. After that one expression of her gladness she had said nothing more about the matter. It had indeed given her a side glimpse into Ralph Malleson's family life—that life about which he was so carelessly silent—but it left her without further curiosity on the point. There was a baronetcy to which he was the apparent heir while the

existence of his brother's boys was unknown; a baronet was to her a remote and indistinct being—a person set on a pinnacle like the Hon. Mr. Berry, the British Minister at the Embassy —a person to be a little afraid of. All this her dear old friend and her father's friend might have become; from this those welcome twins had delivered him. Since he had not grudged them their place, why should any one else mind?

This, or something like this represents the sum of Di's thoughts on the subject; Mrs. Henshaw's it need hardly be said, were rather more complex.

At first, as Ralph had predicted, she had shown much indignation. She had been deceived, and a want of openness (in others) was a fault for which this lady had no pity. She had harboured an imposter—a man who wormed himself into society under false pretences, who sailed on the stream of evening parties, and dinners, and at homes, under stolen colours. It now appeared that he had all along been suspected, that one eye had failed to be dazzled by all this show of honesty, one mind had been quick enough to perceive the essential commonness that lay behind this assumption of breeding.

Philippa, to whom this was said, and whose memory was inconveniently clear, burst out

laughing. Was it in human nature to help remembering the praises of Ralph's nose and his feet?

Mrs. Henshaw was highly offended.

"What are you laughing at?" she said. "If you think secretiveness is a thing to be treated as a jest——"

"I was only thinking, mamma, that you must have had a suspicion of this when you refused to ask Mr. Malleson to dine with us that time the Baird-Browns stayed with us. Of course, a millionaire like Mr. Baird-Brown must want more elbow space than others, one knows that; so there wasn't a corner for Mr. Malleson. What is the use of being rich if you can't crowd others out?"

"Philippa!"—she spoke with cold emphasis—"you may thank me as long as you live that I did not yield to your whim for inviting Mr. Malleson that time you mention. Who can tell what might have happened? It is a mother's duty, however irksome, to be foreseeing and cautious. You were a mere girl then, barely out of the nursery, and a girl's affections are easily ensnared."

"Not when that girl has been well trained," said Philippa, with some bitterness. "As for my youth and my pinafore days, they are little fictions which we have agreed to accept. When

was I a child, I wonder, or too young to balance claims and calculate chances? Don't let us drag a good man's name into our talk. Mr. Malleson was more keen-sighted than you suppose. He understood us."

"Ah, you are angry with me, because I thought it my duty, as a mother, to guide your girlish fancies," said Mrs. Henshaw, with pensive resignation. "Well, I will try to bear it. Perhaps, when you reflect on the life I have saved you from, you will do me justice. Bare justice is all I ask."

"I have yet to know from what I have been delivered," said Philippa proudly. "The lot you have planned for me doesn't seem to me so overwhelmingly good. Oh, mamma," she said, dropping into the old light tone which had yet a touch of melancholy in it, "if we could only have been foolish and blind and uncalculating like other mothers and daughters, the prize might have fallen to us, who knows, without all this striving!"

"You don't know from what you have been delivered!" cried Mrs. Henshaw, still grappling with the first sentence. "Child, are you so much in love with poverty? Do I need to tell you what it means?"

At another time Philippa would have laughed at the picture now drawn for her enlightenment:

turned gowns, one-button gloves, the smell of dinner pervading small airless rooms, washings conducted at home; the eating of one's fish and one's fruit with a steel knife, nay, the having no fish and no fruit to eat! These and many other items her mother gathered, and held up for her warning. From these she claimed to have rescued her by that timely coldness to an old friend.

But, for once, Philippa did not feel an inclination to laugh. This melancholy catalogue reminded her too urgently of the things she liked best to forget. Had not this unsightly underside of life stared her in the face all her days? She knew it very well in all its ugly details; what she knew less well was the certainty that she was henceforth to be delivered from it.

She presently left the room, and returned in a few moments with her hat on.

"I am going out with Di," she said, "to call on two old ladies." She spoke pleasantly; she had quite forgotten her little outburst of bitterness; she never allowed anything to make her uncomfortable for long. "You have a novel, I see. You will not miss me."

"I can amuse myself, I am glad to say," Mrs. Henshaw answered, as if the thought afforded her consolation. She still wore her grand air, and spoke frigidly. "I have always had

many resources. Every well regulated mind has resources." Then, with a sudden descent into the commonplace—"You might have put on your best hat, Philippa, if you are going to pay visits; but, if it is only old ladies you are going to see, it doesn't matter. Of course, *I* can't be expected to go. They ought to call on me."

"You are supposed to be resting after your journey. My appearance will be the signal for them all to appear."

"Three days after an arrival—that is the proper time; but so few people understand how to render a little attention gracefully. A fortnight! It is really quite a slight. I have lost all interest in seeing our English neighbours now."

"Then perhaps I had better hint to them not to come," said Philippa gravely, pausing at the door. "I've no doubt the old ladies know everybody, and will tell their friends. Old ladies generally do spread things."

"I beg you will do no such thing!" Mrs. Henshaw said, in some alarm, taking her daughter seriously. "However discourteously others may treat me I believe I know my duty. I do not expect to find here a society equal to that I left behind—for that I am prepared. It may be dull, it may be underbred, but I trust

I know what is due to my position. You may say, however, if you are asked—and do try to remember the ladylike habits I have striven to teach you—that, having quite recovered from the fatigues of my journey, I am about to attempt a little sight-seeing, under the guidance of our dear Mr. Chester. A fortnight is really long enough to stay at home. One must stand a little on one's dignity.

"Very well, mamma." Philippa showed a demure face through the half-closed door. "But perhaps I had better not say that to the dull ones or the underbred ones; then they would come when you are out, don't you see?"

Before there was time to grasp the meaning of this remark she was gone. Left alone, Mrs. Henshaw's mind went back to Mr. Malleson's defection; his almost wilful desertion of her ranks; for, of course, a plain Mr. Malleson, with no prospects whatever, was not entitled to much social consideration. But presently another element came into play, and her indignation gave place to a kind of lofty pity for his supreme disappointment (to have persuaded her that he was not disappointed would have been an impossible task). By dint of much pondering she had come to the conclusion that, in homely phrase, one reliable string to your bow is better than two on whose strength you cannot wholly

depend. Within the last few weeks certain things had happened that made it possible and even easy to dispense with Mr. Malleson, except, of course, in the capacity of an acquaintance, who might at any moment prove useful.

At this juncture, oddly enough, she remembered the look that passed between him and Deonys on the day of her arrival—a look of friendly trust and understanding that had surprised her. On the whole, it was well that he had proved himself useless to serve as that second string. A conclusion thus, that would have pleased him well.

Are there indeed mothers who calculate and plot as this mother was plotting? daughters who—with whatever secret sense of shame—yet consent to be the subjects of this unholy scheming? or do they only exist between the boards of those novels we put on the top shelf of our library?

Philippa was meanwhile walking gaily at Di's side through a northern suburb of Madrid.

At the end of September you have Madrid at its best. About that time, or the beginning of October, you look for the coming of the little summer of St. Martin, a milder, more glowing, more tender guest than its elder brother, that burns the life out of all but dogs and Frenchmen, and sows the seeds of future

revolutions in the hot Spanish blood. Already as they walked the air was tolerably cool, and the sun not too penetrating to be warded off with umbrellas.

"And where are we going first?" Philippa questioned, as she looked about her with bright, inquiring glances—at the gay pink-tinted houses, and at the peasants, not less gay, who were crowding to the city to attend the fair of San Mateo.

"There are Miss Piper and Mrs. Gordon, you shall choose which to see first," Di answered.

"Then let it be the maiden lady by all means. You and I ought to have more in common with a Miss Piper than with a Mrs. Gordon. On the whole, Di, it is my conviction, arrived at after mature thought, that married ladies are a mistake. They never contribute anything to the talk, except their husbands and children. They might just as decently discourse about themselves."

"Not my Mrs. Gordon," said Di earnestly; "you will like her. Besides, Ralph says she knew you all in England long ago."

"Worse and worse. Married ladies are at all times hard to please—they are used to so much perfection in their husbands and children,—but a married lady who has known all about one as a baby and has registered one's youthful

indiscretions—no, Di! I must be braced for this visit by a little of Miss Piper's society. Miss Piper has never been married; and she didn't know me in my youth, did she?"

"Wait till you see Mrs. Gordon," said Di, smiling, "you will change your mind very quickly. As for Miss Piper, she is not young, and"—she hesitated—"she is my friend."

"Then I hope she will be mine, too," said Philippa quickly, for Di's face had lost its smile and was a little grave.

Their way now lay through wider streets climbing steeply upward. At the top of the hill there was a break between the tall houses; it was almost as if they stood apart on purpose to let one have a glimpse of the long, limitless plain stretching to the wide horizon like a sea.

Di instinctively paused an instant. That far-reaching grey monotony, sad but for the bending blue of the heavens above it, had a nameless charm for her. Philippa looked at it, but she looked at other things as well: at the long, tree-bordered road between the scattered houses; at the dun-coloured, mild-eyed oxen dragging heavy loads of wood, and stirring the powdery dust with their slow feet. The sheep-skins bound about the branching horns made her feel hot only to look at them; the creak of the heavy

wooden wheels grew irritating to her before Deonys had wearied of that wide expanse.

Philippa's glances strayed a little further. Over the way was a rustic wine-shop, with branch of withered green stuff depending from the lintel; at the door stood a clumsy cart filled with inflated pigskins, the muleteer was within the house proving in the most convincing of all fashions that his Val de Peñas needed no bush; among the long train of mules dire anarchy prevailed.

"One more, only one step more, number eight," Philippa said, "and the confusion is complete. Number eight has done it! That way of harnessing the mules is one of the things of Spain that wants mending, one of the very few things in this country of yours, Di, that falls short of perfection."

"Let us get on before the muleteer comes out, and the maledictions begin. *They* won't fall short of perfection, if he can help it," said Di, hurrying on.

They now paused before one of the blocks of houses which lined the road. It was rather a shabby tenement, taken as a whole. It had an air of having see brighter days, and indeed it was almost overshadowed by a large hospital of red brick. They crossed the courtyard and climbed the stairs, climbed till they seemed

nearly to reach the roof. At every landing Philippa, who was dancing on in front, looked back inquiringly; but Di shook her head, and travelled soberly on.

But the tallest house that was ever built ends somewhere short of the sky. And at last Di stopped at a mean little door, and knocked softly. All this time the girl had been very grave.

"It is nice and airy up here," said Philippa, pausing to give some dainty little pats and touches to Di's hair and dress; "but if I were Miss Piper I would slide down on the banister."

Even this idea, comical as it was associated with the lady in question, only drew forth a smile. Deonys felt serious, and almost anxious. This visit to Miss Piper meant something more than a mere friendly call. It was a test which was to be secretly applied to Philippa.

There were some things about Miss Piper for smiling at which you might be pardoned. She was an old maid, and old maids all the world over have been the target for arrows of fine ridicule; but if Philippa had indulged in the mocking mood it might have gone hard with that contract of friendship the girls had signed and sealed.

The small English circle at Madrid was not in all probability less kindly or less charitable

than other social circles, yet it had its light jest now and again, at the expense of this solitary spinster, for whom Deonys had found room in her large tenderness. Just on this one point the girl had become almost morbid in her championship. Those small absurdities and eccentricities that stirred the easy laughter of others awoke her grave and loving pity. She had a way of touching on certain points in the history of this insignificant single woman that made you suddenly ashamed of your merriment.

So it was that Philippa's introduction was a much more serious affair than appeared on the surface; it was a means, the best Di knew, by which to judge of her new friend's sincerity. Ralph had hinted that there were certain things about Philippa that were "not nice;" it was now to be triumphantly proved that this was a mere masculine prejudice.

Miss Piper herself opened the door at the summons. She was a little woman, very faded, and dressed after a fashion quick to betray that her youth, so remote to others, was an illusion to which she still clung. Deonys never laughed at the scraps and tags of ribbons and laces, the soiled artificial flowers that decorated Miss Piper's grey hair, or the coquettish set of her scant flounces; but all the same she promised

herself secretly that, with Madame de Stael, she should learn the art of growing old gracefully.

"How are you?" she asked, stooping to kiss the withered cheek. "I have brought my friend to see you, as I promised. Philippa, this is Miss Piper."

"That was charming of you, my dear," said Miss Piper airily. "I am delighted to know you, Miss Henshaw. As I often tell Deonys, there are so few young people left now. When I first came here I had so many girl friends, but, dear me, they are all married now. So stupid of girls to marry; they grow old and dowdy at once."

"I quite agree with you," said Philippa, in her bright, quick way. "I was telling Di just now that I think married people are a mistake."

"*Quite* a mistake! So glad you agree with me. Di and I made up our minds long ago that nobody should entrap *us* into matrimony—didn't we, my dear? And now, here is another to join our league! We were really feeling quite deserted. To be sure there is Miss Barbara Gordon, but you wouldn't call Miss Barbara very sympathetic, would you, Deonys?"

"Not very, perhaps," said Di, hesitatingly.

"Quite an old maid, I should say."

In the far-off days of her youth, Miss

Piper had been comely; her conversational powers were never great, but she had had a pleasant laugh that went a great way. Now she was no longer comely, and the ripple of laughter, with its fantastic girlishness, went less far. Still it helped, as at this moment, to tide over pauses that might otherwise have been awkward.

They had followed her into the first of the small rooms of which her house consisted. A single glance at its details showed that she was exceedingly poor, but it was a decent, patient, self-respecting, almost a sprightly poverty—a poverty that did not exclude crochet antimacassars and wool mats, sprinkled everywhere, to be in readiness for everything that, by the most liberal interpretation, could be supposed to require this protection. As Miss Piper's industry had been great and her ornaments were few, the mats were sometimes put to uses hardly counted legitimate by her lady friends, who would whisper among each other that each separate bit of china in Miss Piper's scantily furnished cupboard reposed on its own square of woolwork.

"I have this floor all to myself," she explained to Philippa. "It is a little high, perhaps, but wonderfully fresh and airy, and the climb—why, that is nothing. If one were

rheumatic, like poor Miss Barbara, it would be different."

"You have a nice view," said Philippa, standing on tiptoe to peep out of the high window. "Oh, are those the Guadarrama mountains I see there over the roofs?"

"Yes, yes," cried Miss Piper, nodding her head delightedly. "I call that my private and particular view. The downstairs people have none of it, not even the tip of one of those white peaks; the hospital shuts it all out. That is one advantage of being high up. Then it is so select. Nobody to quarrel with, as I often say."

"Do you live quite alone?"

Philippa turned from the window, and seated herself on a little stool at the older woman's feet. Her eyes were soft with a new expression as she looked up into the gentle, smiling face.

"There is my little maid, who comes for an hour every morning and night. She does the rough work; the lighter duties I undertake myself—the dusting of the ornaments, you know. I dare say you have noticed that a servant never can place a thing straight. But Juanita is a good girl," she hastened to add, "and quite a protection when I go out of an evening. I tell Deonys it is very unwise of her to go out even in the day time alone. Some one might speak

to her in the street. I could mention many cases; I have been addressed more than once myself. Spanish men are very wicked, I am afraid, and the way they stare is really most disconcerting."

"Di has me to go with now, and I won't let any one be rude to her. Sometimes, if you will let us, we will come for you, and we can protect each other. He would be a bold man who ventured to speak to us then," said Philippa, smiling.

"That would be charming. A little congenial society is a great pleasure. Juanita is hardly a companion. She is a good girl in her own way, but Deonys, my dear, I'm afraid—I'm afraid!"

Miss Piper ended her sentence with some mysterious movements of her head and hands.

"Not more lovers?" said Di, smiling. "I thought you had persuaded Pepe Davila to give up his claims."

"Pepe drew a bad number at the quinta, and that settled his affairs, poor fellow! I was so sorry for him, and really, when he came here to say good-bye, I felt myself quite giving way. And now—would you believe it? it is his brother!"

"Poor Pepe! he will hardly like that," said Di, who knew the history of all the Marias and Juanas, the Emilias and Amalias, who had in turn served this anxious mistress.

"I give her the best advice in my power. I talk to her almost every day. I say to her, take example by me. I am in no haste to marry, though it is possible—just possible there may have been one or two gentlemen--but what am I saying? Oh, about Juana; the girl actually laughs in my face, and says since she can't wait for Pepe she will take his brother! And of course she will marry, and lose all her youth and spirit."

"I am very sorry--about her leaving you, I mean," Di answered. "But if Pepe's brother and she have made up their minds, you must let us find some one else for you, some one who doesn't want a Pepe."

"Ah, my dear, if you can find her. But they all want a lover, even the ugly ones. I have spoken to so many of them," she turned to Philippa, "but not one would listen." Her face grew sad as she thought of the years she had preached this doctrine without securing a single disciple. "They go and marry, though I beg them to wait and enjoy their youth a little. They all go. It makes one feel lonely, and almost as if one's youth had gone too; and as if one were growing old when they bring their children to see one."

There fell a little silence on them after this. Philippa's eyes were very grave. Surely

it was not difficult to find a little tenderness for a weakness so human and so harmless? Di, looking at her friend, thought she had never seen any one so beautiful.

Then Miss Piper jumped up and said they must have some refreshment. A little ginger-wine, or if not that, then, at least, some sugar-water and a biscuit. Both girls were eager in combating this proposal. Di, who knew very accurately the state of the cupboard, drew the little spinster back to her seat with gentle force, while Philippa declared that wine and sugar-water were things she never touched, and as for tea, she thought that fashion of drinking it in the afternoon was a very stupid one.

"You might show Philippa your family portraits," Di suggested, by way of diverting her thoughts from hospitable designs.

"To be sure!" cried Miss Piper, the little shade of vexation giving place to a smile. "I am glad you reminded me of the miniatures, dear. Family heirlooms," she explained to Philippa. "I call them my credentials. I prefer a simple and retired life—indeed, prudence dictates it, so long as one is unmarried—but, of course, I can't expect the new people here to understand my circumstances, or to take me at my own valuation, so I show them my portraits; that makes everything satisfactory."

The likenesses Philippa had already noticed hanging on the wall; they were the only relief to its bareness. A great deal of loving care had been expended on the frames, which were made of bright coloured-paper, leaves and grasses. They gave the effect of a miniature Père-la-chaise.

Miss Piper took them down tenderly, lightly blowing the invisible dust from them, and handed them to Philippa, with a little running commentary on each. There was a Mrs. Piper of a generation or two back, a stout old lady, with a towering head-dress and broad collar; there were genteel daughters of the Piper family with thin waists and very high noses; and gallant gentlemen in full-bottomed wigs and short waistcoats.

Philippa looked at them all very gravely. The girl was in her gentlest, most human mood. There was to her something inexpressibly sad in this company of slim, smiling ghosts. Yet the little spinster was saying, with that small laugh of hers, that she was never dull with all her family about her, and that, if she were minded to be giddy or imprudent like some of her young friends, how could she with so many watchful eyes upon her?

Last of all, as being the most treasured possession, was produced a faded daguerreotype of

the Rev. Robert Piper, once upon a time chaplain to the Embassy at Madrid. The portrait revealed a hectic, narrow-chested young man, not unlike his sister in the kindly goodwill of a pair of innocent, wide-opened blue eyes.

"We couldn't afford a miniature then," the little lady said, looking with a sudden saddening of her face at the well-loved features; "so we had to be content with this poor substitute. Some day, when I make up my mind to marry, I shall have a large painting executed from this photograph. I mean to make that a little bargain, you know, before consenting. Robert was very handsome; he had the true Piper nose. And such an eloquent preacher; I always thought his fine talents were thrown away here. But you remember him, of course, Deonys?"

"No," said Di gently; "I don't remember him. Major Gibbs does," she added eagerly; "I have heard him say so."

Major Gibbs claimed to be the oldest English resident in the city, and there was the growth of forty years and more over the poor chaplain's modest grave in the Protestant cemetery.

"Ah, well, one forgets how time runs on," she answered with a sigh. "To be sure, it is a good while ago, and I have never been able to make up my mind to leave Madrid since then. Some day I must go and see all my o[illegible]

friends in England again; but it seemed cruel to leave Robert all alone, though that will sound very foolish and sentimental to you, I dare say, for what good can it do him, you will say?"

"No," said Philippa, who was addressed, "I don't think it sounds foolish at all."

For the moment it seemed to her she could thoroughly understand and sympathize with this feeling of reluctance to sever oneself from the last link to vanished friendship—the mortal dust of one held dear. Only, Philippa had never known any one, unless it might be her father, to whose memory such devotion would be possible.

"But you will come and see me sometimes with Deonys?" Miss Piper continued, cheerfully, "and tell me about your gaieties in London. I used to go to a great many routs and dances myself once. I dare say I might be induced to enter society again if I were there; but here one must be very prudent. One cannot be too careful."

"We will come often," they assured her in one breath, as they rose to leave.

Philippa had an engagement which called her home, but to get away was not such an easy matter.

First, Miss Piper insisted on accompanying

them down a flight of steps; and they had to wait till she fluttered into the bedroom to fetch a shawl, which she secured about her curls, "in case any one should meet and speak to me on the way back," she explained. "I assure you, my dears, the way those Spaniards stare is really most disagreeable."

When the final parting was about to be made on the second landing, it seemed as if all the really important questions had been till then forgotten; and what with Miss Piper's timid peeps over the banister, her fears lest any one should come up, and her anxiety to impress on the girls the urgent need of prudence, the farewells bid fair to be prolonged.

"And how is my dear Mr. Malleson? To think that I should have omitted to ask for him all this time. That is what I call an excellent young man."

"He is very well," Deonys tried to say.

"And just as charming as ever," Philippa added, lightly.

"Ah, my dears, take care," came the gentle warning. "Do be prudent, and take time; don't be in haste to commit yourselves."

"We'll be ever so careful," said Philippa, kissing her hand. "Di will keep one eye on me, and I will dragon her like any Spanish dueña."

"To be sure he is a worthy young man," murmured Miss Piper; "and I always feel quite safe with him myself. Still young people are so foolish nowadays. You may tell him that I asked for him, Deonys."

"I'll be sure to tell him."

"And give my best respects to your dear papa."

"I won't forget."

"And do be prudent, and don't let any one speak to you," came the last anxious warning from above, as Miss Piper retraced her steps to the little room—a solitary, fantastic figure, living patient, peaceful days among old and dearly cherished memories and hopes scarcely less dear.

The two girls ran down the many flights of steps hand in hand. At the bottom Di paused, and, impulsively drawing Philippa's face down on a level with her own, she kissed the warm red lips.

"You are so beautiful," said this foolish Di; "and, my dear, I love you so."

The wide court was dimly lit and deserted, and there was no one to see.

Philippa was still grave, and her eyes were sombrely shadowed.

"To think that one may come to that," she said absently. "I wish I may be half as good.

But oh, Di, if you see me taking to a head-dress like that when I am sixty, I beseech you to burn it, or me, which ever you like."

Was it possible to help it? In spite of her youthful severity and her fine championship, Deonys burst into a merry peal.

"Why do you laugh?" said Philippa reproachfully. Her tone was melancholy, but her eyes had a suspicious twinkle in them. "If *I* had laughed, you would never have spoken to me again."

But Di's laughter rang out the more full and clear. Part of it was honest joy, for had not Philippa proved, to the confusion of every doubter, that she was "nice" through and through?

"Come," she said, when she had sobered a little, "we must go home; there is no time for Mrs. Gordon to-day."

"No," said Philippa, who was secretly relieved; "and it is just as well, for I'd very likely have disgraced myself, and lost your fine opinion. I never can behave long at a stretch. Here, Di, take my arm. No, the other one; I must leave this free for action in case any one presumes to look at you."

It was late. The sun had already set, and the pale daffodil of the western sky was fast fading before the swiftly advancing dusk. The

goats were straggling homewards; their bells made a pleasant tinkle as they strayed here and there across the sandy road.

When they reached the Puerta del Sol, the lamps were already lit, but they burned as yet with a pale, inefficient glow. On the balcony, that is reached from the first floor windows of the Hôtel de Paris, a young man was lounging. It was the hour Felix Chester usually devoted to a cigar and such philosophic study of human nature as was possible from his point of vantage. Among the many faces that passed under his scrutiny he did not fail to notice those of the two who were hurrying home with free, elastic step, very different from the indolent grace with which their Spanish sisters walked. Philippa's head was a little haughtily erect, her lips proudly set; she was acting dueña to perfection; but at some word from her companion she dimpled all over with mischievous smiles.

Felix smiled, too, out of sympathy. He was half inclined to swing himself over the balcony, and drop down on the pavement beside them; but he reflected that an athletic feat of that sort might be misunderstood by the populace sauntering beneath him. Besides, there was an excellent dinner awaiting him, which would suffer from his inattention, while Miss Philippa's

smiles could be enjoyed at any moment. It struck him to wonder why the young girl she was protecting so carefully was never present in Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room, by which it will be seen, that, in spite of his psychological researches, he had made no profound study of that lady's character.

Could Philippa have enlightened him? She was parting at that moment from Di with many pretty endearments. There was no word of further meeting that evening. It was good-bye till to-morrow.

"Hásta mañana," cried Di, flying lightly up the dark staircase.

She, at least, needed no further enlightenment; she was well content with her friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

Oli. "What manner of man?"
Mal. "Of very ill manner: he'll speak with you, will you or no."

"This," said Felix, "is what one might call the land of to-morrow. Mañana is a most useful word; I should print it in big capitals in the conversational guides. I knew a fellow who once ran all over Italy on the strength of two phrases written on his card. 'How much does it cost?' on one side, and 'I'll give you the half,' on the other. He made a noble collection of curios, and he wrote a book about his travels afterwards, and that book paid. He might have done Spain on a much smaller capital; I could sum up the necessary words on the fingers of one hand."

"Now, I should call it the land of yesterday," said Philippa. "See how we differ! There's a sort of great-grandmotherly appearance about everything that is rather comfortable and highly respectable. It is like living

among one's ancestors. The eyes of the past keep watch over you. I feel as virtuous under their gaze as Miss Piper surrounded by her miniatures."

"Well, past or future, it's all the same," said Felix. "Whatever it is, it isn't the country of the present. As far as one sees, there is no reason why anything should ever get done here. It is the paradise of loafers; the genus is getting rare elsewhere; I suppose because they all come here."

"That is why we came," said Philippa sedately. "It is so nice to feel that you don't need to be always 'moving on.' We flatter ourselves that England is the home of liberty; it is liberty with a halter round its neck—freedom to do as others do. Can you fancy yourself, for instance, basking in the sunshine seated half way up the steps of St. Paul's?"

"I can imagine the discomfort of the position," he answered, laughing.

"How the people who go to examine the bargains in the Churchyard would stare!" said Philippa meditatively. 'Our chaste bonnet' at five and elevenpence wouldn't have a chance. Yet here we sit, with this gloomy old church behind us, and nobody so much as gives us a passing glance."

"There aren't many to look, are there?" Felix smiled as he surveyed the empty, wind-blown space in front of them; "I noticed two beggars and a dog since we came."

"Oh, you want to destroy my comparison; but all the same this is a public street, and the Atocha is the St. Paul's of Madrid. You are doing what you would not do in London."

"That's unanswerable. Whatever I might be doing, I may safely own that I shouldn't be making a public spectacle of myself on the steps of St. Paul's. I am modest. I hold back and allow others to distinguish themselves."

"I know. You like comfortable obscurity. You would be at your club; that would be pleasanter."

"I might if there was nothing better going. It's a good place to go when you feel bored or out of sorts. You can always pick up a grievance to justify your ill temper. Some fellow is sure to appropriate the paper you want, or the seat you have set your heart on."

"That explains the institution. How nice it must be to have to go in search of your grievances. We keep ours all ready at home. That is why we have no clubs, I suppose."

"Or because you have no irritation to justify."

"No," said Philippa, with her sudden smile; "we are all angels. It is a good thing ladies'

clubs don't succeed. Some hundreds of angels, each more amiable than the other, how tiresome that would be!"

"If you had clubs," said Felix meditatively, "what would become of us when we had worked off some of our noble anger, and wanted a little gentle soothing? What would become of us, if you were hidden behind grim, unscalable walls?"

"I see," said Philippa demurely, "our use in life would be gone."

"At four o'clock, in London, I am always visited with melancholy. You wouldn't think it, would you? but it is true all the same. It's such an aggravating, crawling, creeping hour. There's nothing to look forward to except dinner, and that is three hours off. And it's too soon for the charm to begin. You wouldn't take pity on a fellow, then."

"At four o'clock? Perhaps not."

"I wonder how you get rid of it? You might tell me," said Felix, who was lazily inclined, and not ill pleased to be amused by this slightest of slight talk.

"I decline to commit myself," she answered, shaking her head. "I might be turning one of my gowns, or trimming one of the churchyard bargains, unless I were showing it off in somebody's carriage. At five o'clock you would

find me beautifully dressed, and smiling behind the tea-cups."

"You don't do that sort of thing?" He looked at her with frank astonishment.

"Which sort of thing? Make dresses or tea?" she asked demurely. "You have seen me make tea, I think; as for the rest, I am sorry to contradict you, but it is quite certain that I am my own milliner and dressmaker."

"I should never have guessed it." He looked at her with grave assurance.

"What an equivocal compliment!" she cried, arching her delicate eyebrows. "Don't you know that the art of making a toilet is lost in England, dead and buried ever so many fathoms deep? And when I attempt to revive it for myself, you tell me I may pass muster in a crowd!"

"I didn't mean that," said Felix seriously. "I thought you were an idler, like me, and I find you are one of the working people. Now you will turn round and lecture me, as Ralph does."

"No; I leave you to him."

"Well, he is enough, I assure you. Granted that I am idle. I admit it, but I can give you a thousand reasons to justify it. Why should everybody toil? Work is the curse of our generation; it makes life hideous. We are

losing the very vestige of an idea how to play. We are born old men; we have no boyhood."

"There is a little remnant left—while you live."

"Oh, you are laughing at me, are you? Well, am I not of more use than all your workers if I keep alive the old tradition? When people look at me, they may remember there was such a thing as youth once, and 'dreamful ease.' Of course, I am speaking of England."

"I thought you found the afternoons so long?" said Philippa innocently.

"That is because I can find nobody to play with. Now, here it is different; here everybody plays, and it is you workers who are in a melancholy minority. It would be quite sinful not to make use of one's opportunities here. Ralph can't see it."

"Not even with such a brilliant example before him?"

"And I can't make it out," said Felix, in a puzzled voice, not heeding the interruption. "For a fellow who has lived the half of his life here to go on grinding as he does is a most remarkable thing. Why, everything about you helps on your inclination to idleness!" he cried, prodding with his stick at some moss that had crept between the worn stones. "Sitting here

in the sun that useful word 'to-morrow' has a delightful charm about it. Don't you feel it in the very air? There is no ghost of neglected duty to haunt you; we left that spectre behind us on the other side of the Channel. Just think how little there is you really require to do. Is there any one you want to see, or don't want to see? All that can wait till to-morrow. Here one is delivered from the plague of a daily post, because the letters don't arrive—till to-morrow; so you don't need to bother about answering them. There are no newspapers except Spanish ones, and, as they concoct all the foreign news at home, it would be a mere waste of time and temper to read them. There is absolutely no reason why you should do anything but enjoy yourself; and if it doesn't come within your plan of enjoyment to poke about that musty old church behind us, why, that, too, can be put aside till this slowfooted 'mañana' arrives."

"So you may as well sit down again," he added, for she had risen.

"All very well for you," she answered, dimpling all over with mischievous smiles; "you who have paced and measured the Atocha, and made notes about every dusty banner and worn tombstone in that little book you carry. I know you. You have detected Baedeker

stumbling. I dare say you've written to the editor, or publisher, or whoever it is, though you pretend to be so lazy."

The little assumption of cynicism, which he loved to put on, modelling himself on his cousin whom he had always admired, was a mere farce, which she was quick enough to detect very early in their acquaintance. It sat on him the more oddly that he was, for his years, very young, and that he was, in reality, ready to extend an eager hospitality to each new sensation.

"Come, you may as well confess."

He turned round and looked up at her, and they both laughed.

"I thought it would amuse me," he said, "but it didn't. There is nothing to be seen that you haven't seen a hundred times. Take my word for it."

"I always take my own word for things. It is perverse, I know, and may sound rude, but it is me. I can't help it."

"You will repent it. It will bore you."

"No," she said softly. "I can't afford to be bored, like you. Not yet, I must enjoy things while I can. By-and-by I may not be able to amuse myself."

"Don't lose this chance, then. Much better stay here. You will find them very gloomy. I am sure old Ralph hates it, in spite of his conscience."

"I dare say he does, and mamma too; but then, her sense of duty, the duty of verifying Murray, carries her on heroically."

"You have no duty to perform."

"Oh yes, I have," she answered, turning away. "I am going to rescue Di. If any one should be tired, it is Di. She has seen it all a hundred times. No one thinks of her."

"Shall I ask her to come out here beside us?"

"No," she said quickly. "I am going to her." But she turned once more and asked suddenly, without looking at him, "Why did you tell us that story about him—your cousin. It was a mistake."

"What story?"

"You know. About his having succeeded to the title."

"How was I to know that Roderick had married? He choose to keep that piece of information to himself. He was always a queer beggar."

"I think it was Mr. Malleson who was 'queer' to make a mystery of it."

"He considered it his own affair, I suppose," said Felix philosophically. "You don't know old Ralph if you think he talks about everything."

"You take his disappointment very coolly, I think."

"Well"—he looked at her for the first time a little curiously—"where would be the use of taking it warmly? Why should I care, if he doesn't? A title wouldn't improve him."

She smiled.

"He wouldn't grace it," she said.

"If there had been responsibilities connected with it, it would have been different. He is not the man to shirk any duty, however much he hated it; but there is no land, and very little money. And as for a mere handle to his name, I think, for my part, he is better without it."

"You think a great deal of him."

"I have good reason," he answered composedly.

"I, too, like him best as he is—much best.'

She was addressing the distant horizon, and she spoke gravely, and with almost unnecessary earnestness.

"I dare say you will find it difficult to believe me, but it is true."

"Why should I find it difficult to believe you?"

She stood quite still for a moment, while he asked this question; then she glanced down at him and laughed. "I am going to Di," she said, and, without any further explanation, she went.

Of course he meant to follow her, but he did not do so at once.

She had a great attraction for him, this strange, beautiful girl, sometimes so startlingly frank, sometimes so reticent and reserved; but just at this moment a cigar was a stronger compelling force than the inclination to go with her. A cigar and the golden, mellow sunlight falling on the worn steps, turning the tufts of moss in the crevices into a border of rare colour; the infinite blue of the sky above him; the sadness of the gloomy church hidden behind him; and that "to-morrow," that was to bring again the work and the business of life, so far distant as to be only a vague shadow that threw into greater relief the light about him—who could ask or desire more?" Not young Felix, certainly, into whose Arcady as yet no Phyllis had wandered to draw him by her spells from all that made the hour so fair.

The little plan of going a sight-seeing had been carried out, but not quite as Mrs. Henshaw intended. Miss Piper and Miss Barbara Gordon had called before this arrangement took effect. Their sudden alacrity was almost as displeasing as their former dilatoriness, for it is undeniable that Mrs. Henshaw considered the visit ill-timed, and found both ladies dull. Miss Piper, in her timid way, had touched upon those ancestors on whom her claims to consideration rested, and had been pronounced "to give her-

self airs." Miss Barbara, on the other hand, had been dogmatic, and even, perhaps, dictatorial.

"It was 'You ought to do this,' and 'You must do that,' just as if she were my schoolmistress," the lady explained, plaintively expressing her sufferings.

"She reminds me so much of Miss Black, at Brighton. I am sure she must have kept a school, Philippa. I can't be mistaken in the type. Miss Black was an old-maid, too. They are all alike."

When Philippa hinted that Miss Piper was a spinster also, and that nobody would suspect her of keeping a school; there had come that retort about her giving herself ridiculous airs.

"As if any one bearing the absurd name of Piper could be of good family! We might just as well have gone out as you proposed, child" (Philippa did not remember to have made the suggestion), "for I am sure, if the society here has nothing more attractive to offer, it was wasted time staying at home. And just when I do take a little run out for my health, of course Major Gibbs calls in my absence. Quite my usual luck. If you had been at home to show him some little attention, now—you might have offered him some wine: gentlemen are always thirsty—but, of course, you were out,

too. I really must keep you with me during calling hours."

"Very well, mamma," Philippa had made answer; "we must start a regular day at home, then we should be certain to secure Major Gibbs, and we could have the wine and the pretty little attentions all ready. To be sure, Miss Piper and Miss Barbara might come, too; but then tea would do for them."

Then, seeing that nothing more was to be hoped for from society, the duty, which every travelling Briton loves to fulfil, was undertaken.

Here, again, things fell out not quite according to the original plan, for when Felix was requested to act as guide, it being known that he had already accomplished the part his country expected of him, that young man lazily suggested that his cousin Malleson was the proper person to lead the van.

Mr. Malleson, consenting gracefully, had added, in an easy way, that Deonys Ouvry was more "up" in such matters than he, who had confined his studies to the political aspects of the country. Thus it came about that the party was increased from three to five; there was nothing for it but to accept the inevitable.

When Di, escorted gaily by Philippa, came downstairs, she found Mrs. Henshaw very gracious.

"Here," said Philippa, "is the captive. I deliver her over to you, mamma."

"I am sure we are very much obliged to you, my dear," said Mrs. Henshaw condescendingly. "Mr. Malleson tells me you are quite a clever guide, and I prize instruction above all things. I am willing to be instructed by anybody." She looked round her, as if claiming applause for this sentiment. "As I tell my daughter often, true intelligence is always humble."

"Indeed, I know almost nothing," said Di, looking rather alarmed, and casting reproachful glances at Ralph, who was negligently examining the pictures. "I am not a good guide."

"Never mind, sweet one," said Philippa, laying her hands on the other's shoulders; "humility isn't critical. You can heighten all the tragedies, and jumble up the dates without fear of detection. It's a good while since mamma was at Brighton; and, as for me, I've never been at school at all."

"You make me regret I did not send you," said Mrs. Henshaw severely, "when you talk in that unbecoming way."

"Ah, but think how much more disagreeable I might have been if I had been as learned as this child," she answered, with a merry glance at Malleson. "Not that you are disagreeable, nor that any amount of wisdom could make

you that. It is only where I am concerned that ignorance is bliss."

"I think, Miss Ouvry, you had better come with me," said the older lady suavely, sweeping out of the room and inviting Di to follow; "I shall protect you from the sallies of my foolish Philippa. I dare say you have noticed that it is a little whim of hers to disparage herself; but, I assure you, it is quite remarkable how clever she is. All her masters united in saying so; and, as I gave her the most expensive masters that were to be had in London and Paris, of course you will agree with me that their judgment was final."

Di felt a little puzzled by this flow of words. Was it because the masters were expensive that Philippa was clever, or did they demand larger remuneration on account of her superior talent? It sounded like a rhyme that might go on for ever.

She was beginning to say, in her grave, shy way, how pretty Philippa was, and how bright, when Felix Chester joined them. He was rather late, but he had a frank air of ignoring that fact, and presented himself as if punctuality was one of his virtues. It somehow came about presently that he fell behind with Philippa, while the others walked on in front. In this order they arrived at the church, and in this order, as we have seen, they remained.

If Malleson had weakly hoped by enlarging the party to shelter himself from a too minute examination into his affairs, he soon found himself mistaken. While he wandered about the vast old church, taking, to do him justice, the chief burden of explanation on his own shoulders, it seemed as if the dim traditions that linger about the Chapel Royal had an odd way of doubling back on the present. Kings and queens had plighted troth before the great altar, and had made vows which were sometimes held in faithful remembrance and sometimes forgotten; yet it appeared as if it were Malleson himself, or his grandfather, his uncle, or his cousin who had been treacherous to some binding promise, and against whom the old walls, had they speech, would have cried out. What had he done, or what had some one else done, to bring down this lady's large displeasure?

Between every item of information, which he gave with a desperate attempt to keep to the subject, came some such irrelevant question as:

"Do you know who the woman was? Very likely some low person of whom he was ashamed."

"I assure you she was a very haughty princess, and it was quite a brilliant affair. Spain is the place for pomps and vanities and a royal marriage —— "

"Oh, of course; I was not speaking of Ferdinand. I was thinking of your cousin, and how he came to tell us such a strange story. It really seems very odd that he should not have known."

"Felix was not present. It's a good while ago, you see; and when you come to think of it, he could hardly be present."

"Oh, you tiresome man!" cried Mrs. Henshaw, veiling her irritation by an assumption of playfulness. "Of course, I was referring to the babies!"

"Ah, the babies; yes, we can go and see the font. But they christen the royal children generally in the chapel of the palace. Did you notice our flag up there among the dusty banners? I'm always ashamed to see our national colours in such a position."

"I see I am not to be allowed to approach the subject," she said, tapping him airily with her fan.

"Take care," said Malleson gravely; "there is a step in front of you. Come this way."

"You have a proud spirit; you prefer to bear your wrongs in silence. That has always been my way. A dignified silence is what I have aimed at under all my trials. Now, with poor Mr. Henshaw it was so different. He had no fortitude. I have really seen him break down quite like a child."

Malleson did not evince the surprise that was expected of him on hearing this. It would have astonished him to learn that the late Mr. Henshaw had preserved any remnant of endurance after the first year of married life.

"So this is the font. Dear me, quite a plain affair. But, you know, Mr. Malleson, though you are so heroic, you can't prevent my pitying you. You have my sincere pity."

He felt that he needed it, though not on the grounds she supposed. He even found himself envying the battered effigy of a carved knight, lying in a profound peace, undisturbed by any strife of tongues. The gloom of the dreary place fell upon him, as he continued his task, with a melancholy that could not be shaken off. He was at no time a very patient man, and it cannot be said that he performed his duties gracefully. Di had been weary of it all long before this, but she was always hindered in her little attempts to escape by a well-timed question or remark.

"We really can't do without [illegible], my dear. Two judgments are better than o[illegible] you know; and I love to get a full account of everything. Ah, there is Philippa, she will not like this; darkness always affects her. She is like me—so sensitive. Philippa, my love, did you want me?"

She came in like a ray of light in her white

dress; but her only reply was to draw Deonys away, putting an arm round her waist.

"Are you tired, my pretty one—tired of telling the musty old stories about this musty old place? Come and sit down here; there is none to forbid. I don't want you to tell me anything; I'll take it all in faith. There can't be anything very pleasant to hear about so dark a place."

"I'm a little tired," Di confessed.

She sat down on a lower step; and, taking off her hat, laid her head on Philippa's lap.

"And I don't wonder," said Philippa, softly stroking back the ripples of brown hair. "What with the ghostliness and the grimness, and with my excellent mamma's—no, I will be good; lie still, Di."

For Deonys had made a little protesting movement at the last words.

"How melancholy it is! Mr. Chester was right," said Philippa, looking about her. "One feels as if all the sadness of life might take shelter here."

"Is life so sad, then?"

"I don't know. I've a suspicion that it is, but I hide it away somewhere. I never let it look me in the face. It will be time enough to find out when one can't help it. But if I wanted to cry, I should come here."

"I can't fancy you crying, Philippa."

"Can't you? That sounds a little severe, do you know? But it is true that I don't indulge much in tears. I never found out the use of them, unless to make you ugly: a red tip to your nose, and a red rim to your eyes, and a cold in your head. You may be forgiven for not inflicting that kind of penance on yourself."

"I don't know how it is," said Di, staring out into the dimness in front of her, "but I think I could cry very easily. It seems as if it would be much easier for me to be unhappy than for you. I can imagine so many things that would make one sad. Only I shouldn't come here."

"Where would you go, then, to do your wailing, my poor, melancholy Di?"

"Oh, I don't know. Somewhere where there was nobody; not even dead people."

"Except me. I, who am such a butterfly, such a creature of sunshine and happiness and easy, untroubled days—I should come and comfort you."

"But you mightn't be there, or——"

"Or, I might be the cause of your unhappiness? Now, you weren't going to say a horrid thing like that, were you?"

"No; how could you make me unhappy?" said Di incredulously. She did not reflect that

it is from our dearest friendships that most of our sorrows take their birth. Sorrow was to her an alien thing—a dim something that was nobody's fault, that came from some far-off shore, outside the circle of one's joys.

"Do you know we are talking nonsense," she said; "at least I am. I who have been so happy always."

"It is all the fault of the place. And so the kings and queens are married here! Poor things! it is enough to chill their fancy for each other—if they happen to have any—at the outset. Can't you imagine those two stone gentlemen under the banners getting up and imploring the foolish couple to think better of it?"

"Better of being afraid of the Atocha? That would be good advice, though it might frighten them still more if it came to them in that way," Di said, laughing.

"No, you quick child; better of getting married."

"Why should they?"

"Because they would most probably repent it."

"You know better, Philippa. If people care for each other it must be very good to marry."

"Ah, but that is a big 'if'! Many marriages are made with the caring left out. It is best

to start on that understanding, for sooner or later the caring ceases."

"Philippa, why do you talk like that?"

"Why? I am giving you this benefit of my observations in the course of my journey through life."

"But you wouldn't cease to care——" Deonys put up her hand to touch the beautiful curving lips as if she would have silenced them. She was uneasy at the turn their talk had taken.

"No, my dear; because I should begin the other way I mentioned. I should start without the caring."

"I don't believe anything so horrid of you."

"They wouldn't tie the knot for an insignificant Protestant here, would they?" she went on mischievously, only half in earnest in her attempt at cynicism. "Because the gloom would be well in keeping with the circumstances of my nuptials. It's a case of the highest bidder; and he, I have noticed, is not generally a very attractive person, to put it nicely. You see, Di, there are possibilities of unhappiness even in my life."

"Philippa, don't! If you knew how I hate to hear you talk like that. It's not nice!"

"'Don't, don't, don't!' you limit me dreadfully in subjects to-day, my little Di. Well

then, I won't, and if ever I do—isn't that Irish?—you shall act the part of stone knight, I promise you. Here is my pledge."

She stooped and softly kissed the brow from which she had brushed the brown hair.

Di sat up and made a girdle of her two hands encircling the other's neck. She was half unconscious of the earnestness of her look, for she was thinking of the young man sitting outside on the sunny steps—the careless favourite of fortune, whom surely it would not be so very difficult to love.

"Well," said Philippa, dimpling all over, "does my face play me false? I assure you I was quite solemn over that promise."

"Come out, come out into the light!" said Di, letting her arms fall suddenly, and rising up. "The chill and the darkness have made us both stupid."

"I don't own to the stupidity." Philippa shook her head. "I was fearfully prophetic."

"Hush, hush! I won't listen to another word. Look! Your mamma and Ralph have finished at last, and there—is not that Mr. Chester?"

"Oh, yes; that is Mr. Chester. He was wise enough to stay outside; which does not say much for our attractions, my dear."

"He knew you would come out again."

"And not the property of the highest bidder

yet," said Philippa lightly. "Look! our stone knight hasn't moved so much as an eyelid."

When they were all assembled on the steps, it appeared that Mrs. Henshaw's appetite for sight-seeing was not yet satisfied. A new accession of gloom fell upon Malleson. They went on much in the same order as that in which they came, except that Philippa kept Di's arm in a firm clasp, and would not let her go. As usual, she led the talk, and it pleased her to come back to the subject of dress. She had shaken off her prophetic forebodings with considerable ease.

"You don't see any of the ladies' journals in your club, do you?" she asked, turning to Felix.

"Well, no," he answered, with a smile.

"Well, you would see some things that would surprise you. There are the people who ask questions: whether you ought to reject a young man because he is two inches shorter than you, or because he has red hair; how much soap a family of four and a baby ought to use in a year; how many cards at a time you ought to leave on the rector's wife, and that kind of thing. These are the people who have a thirst for information, and they are mysterious enough; but the women I want to know about are the women who are anxious to change clothes with each other."

"To change clothes with each other!" echoed Di and Felix in a breath.

Philippa nodded.

"Yes, dresses and jackets and bonnets—everything. Suppose I get tired of this gown"—she glanced down at it; it was as neat and simple as a dress could be—"all I've to do is to write a little paragraph about it, and send it to one of those obliging magazines. I put its best points forward, of course. I don't say that I made it myself, you know, or that you trod on it, Di, and tore it at the waist. I mention, in an easy way, that it is made of stuff that royalty patronizes; and that I am only parting with it because I have such a very extensive wardrobe that I really never get a chance to wear it. So I brush it and fold it up neatly; and next day, sure enough, I find that somebody else has got tired of *her* gown, and wants mine in exchange. Think," she said plaintively, "of wearing a dress that another woman had walked in, and sat in, and gone to church in, and laughed in, and cried over. What queer stories that dress might tell if it could speak."

"What a ghostly idea!" said Di.

"There are people, hundreds of them, who have a passion for that kind of barter," said Philippa, solemnly, "and I want to know who they are."

"It might do very well if people were all one size," said Di; "but when a big woman get's a little woman's costume, what then?"

"It's like a fellow I know," said Felix, laughing, "who is always changing his page. The livery isn't a perquisite, but it does wear out sometimes. The last candidate for the place was a little fellow, but as he seemed smart enough, and likely to stay, the new clothes were made for him. But he didn't stay—nobody does stay there. My friend told me he had advertized everywhere for a lad to fit the livery; but he thought they had all grown tall on purpose to aggravate him. The latest owner of the suit reminded me strongly of Smike, in his liberal display of wrist and ankle."

It is to be supposed, though their talk was not very profound, that this trio enjoyed themselves more than the couple who walked sedately in front. They visited certain other churches, all of which are excellently described in the guide book to which Mrs. Henshaw made constant reference, requesting Deonys to read the information aloud, so that, as she said, one might hear every side of the question. Philippa and her companion were allowed a considerable amount of liberty, and generally enjoyed it with their backs turned to the work of art under examination; but the lady's thirst for informa-

tion permitted neither of the others to join them. They had wandered at last to the Museo Nacional. Malleson glanced up at the sky with the air of an imprisoned captive; in the slow gathering dusk he saw a faint promise of release.

"Unless she is inspired with the frightful idea of looking at things by gaslight," he said to himself; "if it comes to that, I'll bolt."

The chief treasure, guarded by the walls of the Museo, is well known to every lover of Murillo. The saintly Thuringian queen, sweetest impersonation of tender and sympathizing womanhood, bent on deeds of gentlest charity, for ever glorifies the little museum. Malleson forgot, for the moment, his depression while looking at the well known group; he failed to hear the aimless remarks that had tortured his ear all the afternoon. Something beyond the beauty of the picture touched him. She was almost his ideal, —this queenly woman with the pathetic intensity of her desire for helpfulness shining out of her eyes—almost, and yet not altogether. For was not his ideal mistress here in the flesh, breathing the same air with him, looking at him with friendly, confiding glances, soothing him by her mere presence? Yet he thought it was only the painter's spell that was on him, tranquilizing him; and she, standing a little

apart before the sweet peace of the pictured scene, never knew how near love had come to her.

In a little while, a touch on her arm startled her. She looked round. Felix Chester stood behind her. He stepped back hastily, and his look seemed to beg her to follow. There were one or two visitors in the room whom, by his movement, he dexterously placed between her and Mrs. Henshaw.

"Miss Ouvry, pardon me," he said, "but Miss Henshaw sent me to you."

"Is she ill?" said Di, in alarm.

"No; but she has unexpectedly met—an acquaintance, I suppose, I must call him," he glanced distrustfully towards the other end of the room. "I think she wants to go home."

"An acquaintance!" said Di bewildered. "She knows no one here."

Yet while she spoke she was following him as he went, still keeping that line of strangers between her and Philippa's mother.

"I think she wishes to go home quietly with you, if you don't mind," he said again.

They had now crossed the room which, at its further end, was deserted except by two people. Di hardly knew her friend. Philippa looked queenly, but not with the royal grace and loving charity of the pictured princess at whom

they had been looking; every line of her face and figure expressed haughty scorn—her head was poised defiantly, her lips which Di had hardly seen without a smile, were proudly curved, her beautiful eyes were lit with anger. Not far from her, standing quietly, yet wearing an air of being master of the position, was the apparent object of all this sudden passion. Di only bestowed one look on him. In that glance she saw a man of middle age. His face was pale, and his expression coldly passive; he had bushy red whiskers, which he held gathered about his chin in one hand; his eyes, which were light in colour, were fixed on Philippa.

All this, though it takes time to tell, occupied but a moment. Before Philippa had moved, Di went up to her, and laid her hand softly on her sleeve.

"Come, dear," she said, "come home."

The girl's tense expression relaxed a little at the touch. Taking Di's outstretched hand and drawing it within her arm, she went away silently, without so much as a gesture of farewell. Felix watched the two girls until, unseen by Mrs. Henshaw, they had safely left the room. Then he turned on his heel and sauntered up to the group standing before the picture.

"To tell her, or not to tell her?" he questioned himself. "Aye or no, gentlemen? The

ayes have it; no they haven't. Our red-whiskered friend shall be left to get out of the scrape unaided. To judge by appearances another such reception would be salutary."

But a like reception was not to be accorded him. Felix's eyebrows were raised in genuine surprise, when, a moment later, Mrs. Henshaw's wandering glances fell upon the stranger.

"Dear me, Miss Ouvry has deserted us," she was exclaiming, in a dissatisfied tone. "How easily young people tire nowadays! I thought my daughter was with you, Mr. Chester," she broke off, seeing that it was Felix, and not his cousin who stood near her.

"She was with me till a moment ago," Felix began, seeing he was "in for it," but having said this, he said no more. He was delivered from further explanation; the explanation was there behind him, in the shape of a pale-faced man with red whiskers.

He was not specially quick at reading faces, but he could not fail to perceive the instantaneous look of dislike or dismay—it might have been either—that crossed Mrs. Henshaw's face, when she became aware of the man's presence. It was so subtle and evanescent, however, that he almost fancied himself mistaken, when, on turning away with the true instinct of a gentleman, unwilling to surprise a

secret not meant for his eyes, he heard Mrs. Henshaw greeting the new-comer courteously, if not cordially.

He went up to his cousin.

"I say, Ralph," he said, "I think we may take ourselves off now. We aren't wanted any longer."

"You aren't," said Malleson, still in the depths of gloom.

"Nor you, either, old fellow. You may look round without being caught up for it."

The first use Ralph made of this permission was to search the room for Deonys.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"She, meaning Miss Ouvry, has gone home with Miss Henshaw."

"Was she sick of it all? I am not surprised," he answered, relapsing into melancholy.

"She, meaning Miss Henshaw, *was* surprised, I should say," said Felix, with laughing eyes, "and not grateful for the surprise either. The cause you will discover for yourself, if you look behind you."

He did as he was bid, and examined the stranger with evident disfavour.

"Who is the man?" he asked at last. His tone expressed a new kind of disgust.

"There you know as much as I do," Felix answered; "and I am not pining for greater

light. You see we are not wanted, and may as well go. Come and dine with me. They give you a very decent dinner at the Paris; and you shall smoke a better cigar than any you can buy here, though it is the home of the weed."

Malleson suffered himself to be led away without any resistance. Once on the way to the Puerta del Sol, he stopped abruptly in the middle of the pavement.

"I don't want to have her mixed up with people like that," he said.

Felix looked at him, but he made no reply.

CHAPTER IX

"O most delicate fiend!
Who is't can read a woman?"

PHILIPPA was still silent when she and her companion reached the street. She walked quickly, perhaps to preclude the possibility of Di's asking her any questions. But Di was also silent. She glanced at Philippa once or twice; her face was darkly moody, and every movement expressed surprised and haughty anger. Whoever the stranger might be, he had the power to move her strangely. Suddenly she slackened her pace, and, with one of the quick changes of mood to which Di was beginning to grow used, she said—

"My poor Di, I am using you shamefully; you are quite out of breath."

"No, no, Philippa; go as fast as you like. You want to get home, don't you?"

"He won't dare to follow me," she said proudly; "but if he should, I won't give him

the satisfaction of thinking I am running away from him. Let us go slower."

Di was silent; she did not know what to say, but she glanced behind her rather fearfully. She was relieved to see no pale, passive face gleaming out of the gathering dusk.

"After all, what good can it do?" Philippa said presently, with a new change to despondency. "Mamma will be sure to give him our address. He will walk home with her, very likely, to make sure she has mentioned the right one. He is capable of every meanness."

"Let us get home fast," Di urged, again with the fear of a stealthy step behind her; "and you can come up to our rooms. No one will trouble you there."

She felt a growing dislike to the stranger; and she was bewildered above all by the mysterious relations in which he and Philippa seemed to stand towards each other. What did it all mean? If he were simply a person she did not want to know, why this strong display of feeling?

Philippa said nothing to enlighten her. She was brooding silently till they had reached their own door; but when they ran upstairs, and Di would have drawn her further, she resisted.

"No, I can't come," she said. "I couldn't stay with you always; and he would wait, if it were a year, till I came down. Come with me instead; don't leave me just yet."

Di followed her reluctantly. Philippa went straight to her own room; she took off her outer dress and put it away, then she uncoiled her long hair and let it fall about her shoulders. There was an air of determination in all her actions, that was new to her friend. Her lips were compressed, and her expression defiant.

"What are you doing?" Di asked surprised. Could she be intending to make a toilet for the benefit of the stranger?

"I am going to bed. Do you understand, Di? I am ill; you hear me. I am ill."

"It would be better to say openly you don't want to see this—person," said honest Di. "Nobody can make you against your will."

"Nobody shall make me, that is very certain."

"Then don't let him think he can force you to do things that aren't true."

"There is no danger of *his* mistaking," said Philippa disdainfully. "He knows very well that I loathe the sight of him; but it is the only way to escape him, and to gain a little time. Besides, Di, I am not making a false excuse. Just feel how my brow burns. What a

nice cool hand it is," she said, as Di's soft touch fell on her hot forehead.

She turned in her chair, and looked up into the other's face.

"To think that a wretch like that has it in his power to spoil everything!" she said, with an impatient sigh. "I thought I had seen the last of him, and just here, where I was so happy, he comes to take away my peace."

There was silence for a moment or two. Di did not know what to say.

"What do you think of me *now?*" Philippa demanded suddenly.

"I don't know; I don't understand," she answered in a troubled voice.

"Of course you don't understand. You could never have done it yourself. You would need to have been brought up as I was, to understand anything about it."

"I don't know what you have done," said Di, gathering courage; "but I am sure, whatever it is, you might undo it. There is nothing to take away our peace except wrong things that we have not put behind us." Her voice trembled a little. "You know I don't know how to say things," she said, bending her head till her cheek touched Philippa's. "But oh, Philippa, don't do anything that isn't true; that can only make matters worse."

"I wish I had had you always," said Philippa, touched by the tremulous little speech; "there might have been a chance for me then. Why weren't you my little sister? But no, I should not have liked that fate for you; and you would not have liked mamma for a mother."

This was undeniable, but it was also unanswerable.

"I suppose I ought to give up having you for a friend," she went on, her voice hardening a little. "I told you I should disappoint you."

"There are two to that bargain," said Di more lightly. "You can't prevent me from being your friend, even if you give me up."

"You would be horrified, if I told you everything."

"I am not so easily horrified," said Di, with the confidence of innocence. "I suppose that man is—one of your lovers?"

"He is one of my lovers," Philippa answered bitterly.

"Well, he doesn't look very nice." Di spoke as cheerfully as she could. "And if you don't like him, why can't you tell him so?"

"Oh, Di," said Philippa, unable to resist a laugh, "what an innocent child you are! Listen! you shan't make rash vows without knowing more about me."

"No, don't tell me," said Di shrinkingly.

"I must. Here is the short and the long of it. I've put myself into that man's power." The confession was made with the abruptness of shame.

Di involuntarily moved back a step. She remembered the look of possession on the stranger's face. Was this the clue to it?

"You may well shudder. Can you imagine a more melancholy position for any one who isn't the heroine of a novel? I am not the heroine of a novel, and there is no chance of everything coming straight for me at the end of the third volume."

"I don't know how it could become possible," Di answered, trying to show as little as might be how much she disliked the whole subject; "but don't tell me anything you would rather I didn't know. I can be your friend now, from this time, without going back on what is past."

"But I can't put the past behind me in that easy way," cried Philippa. "I thought I had done it, and see how I've succeeded! I've got to face it, and the future too; and, I can tell you, it's like passing from one ledge of purgatory to another—from the ice to the fire."

"Can the father help you, or Ralph?" Di said hesitatingly. "I am sure they would if they could. Won't you speak to either of them?"

"No, no, no!" cried Philippa, "not for the world. Not Mr. Malleson, of all people! Nobody can help me, unless you know of some good fairy who would give me a fortune."

"A fortune! Is it money?"

"It's everything." She spoke impatiently. "At any rate, I must manage alone. I'll fight with my own weapons, and succeed if I can, if not—— But there, I'm not going to think of that possibility. If you love me, Di, will you call Blake? I must secure one good meal, for I'm going to be an interesting invalid after this. I shall have the dear old woman's sympathy, that is certain. She hates him as much as I do. And, do you know, little one, in spite of the state of my health and temper, I'm dreadfully hungry."

"I wish you wouldn't pretend to be ill; you are looking perfectly well," said Di, pausing at the foot of the bed, and examining Philippa's face, once more mischievous with smiles.

"And you, my dear, are looking as doleful as if you were sorry for it."

"I hate mysteries," said Di, with some energy.

"Well, as a rule, I don't. I've been brought up on Machiavellian lines, you see; but just at present I do hate to have to resort to my bed. for we were having such nice times. I shall

believe now in presentiments. That man must have been lurking somewhere in the church, to make it so cold and gloomy. And you, my dear, who knows how soon you may be called on to play that *rôle* of stone knight!"

"I never shall."

"What! you would leave me unwarned to my fate! Come here," she said, suddenly softening. "Here, let me put my arms round you—so. Don't look so grave and so sad; I'm not worth it. You must let me laugh, or else I shall cry, and that would do no good. Listen, Di, for the sake of your dear little self, I'll take what you would call the honest way; but, oh, you have no idea what a coward I am, and to what a pitch I'll have to screw my courage before I can begin!"

"I knew you would do what is right," Di said simply, stooping to kiss her.

And, with this assurance to comfort her, she went slowly upstairs. She took a more sorrowful heart with her than she had ever yet known in her short life. The first glimpse of something that is less than the best in one's chosen friend—who does not know the sharp pain and sting of it? Is not all the world thenceforward a little the darker?

Later in life, when one has outgrown illusions with other happy things of childhood, one learns,

by more or less sad experience, that friendship makes many demands. It is paid for, perhaps, at a price of patience, of forbearance, of fidelity that trusts and loves on in spite of a sharpened vision of faults and failings. But in youth there is no counting of the cost, no fear of loss or lessening, no limit to the unquestioning, undoubting, happy faith in the nobility of one's first friend.

There were many things that Di felt might have been better in her own life (though to others it seemed a blameless record enough)—that she would have done differently, if she had had the power to do them over again; but this sensitiveness as to her own shortcomings had never troubled her on behalf of those about her. Hers was emphatically and before all things a loyal nature. She could not—there are women who can—pass on the vows made to the dead lover of yesterday to the living lover of to-day; make you her confidant at one hour and me the next, and deliver over the cheap and worthless pretence of affection to the first new-comer who cares to claim it. As little could she be faithless to friendship; with her to love once was to love on, whether wisely or not. Already as she sat with the grey shadow of the night, looking in phantom-wise at the window—sat in sorrowful idleness, a little less happily sure of

everything than she had been three hours before, her heart was rising up to make excuses for Philippa, to plead for her, to reinstate her on the old throne—if it might be, to establish her in that high place for ever. Love made loyalty easy.

On the other side of the Puerta, there were two who were at this moment also somewhat deeply engaged in the study of Philippa's affairs. During the meal to which Felix had invited his cousin they had talked of other matters. The dinner was excellent, and Ralph was not insensible to its mollifying effects; he had thrown off his gloom, and was an attentive enough listener to Felix's anecdotes. For a young man, who posed as one of the bored and indifferent school, Felix had a wonderful relish for all that concerned his set. Ralph was used to his outpourings, and lent a half-amused interest as he described whimsically, and not without good-nature all the light and flying talk of the past London season—the marriage of this old friend, the failure of that; the things people had done or not done, the things they were supposed to be about to do. It was the voice of society that spoke, making this young fellow its mouth-piece; but it reached Ralph Malleson without a shadow of its old authority. Once he, too, had found it necessary to be ac-

quainted with all that went on in the little world of London life, as young Felix found it now, but that was long ago. His horizon had widened or narrowed—as one may look at the matter—since then, and the echo of the old days woke no answering chord.

"What a monstrous day it has been," he said presently, when there was a pause in the flow of story and reminiscence, yawning and leaning back in his chair. "You won't get me to go sight-seeing in a hurry again—not with the mother, at least."

"I think she's very good fun," said Master Felix, laughing; "she amuses me."

"Does she, indeed! I wonder you deny yourself so much of her company, then."

"I get a good deal of it, as a rule; but it was your turn to-day."

"She patronized Murillo," said Ralph gloomily; "she patted him on the back."

"Well, she was only following Goldsmith's advice, 'Praise the works of Perugino, but say he might have done better if he had taken more pains.'"

"What did you bring them here for?" Ralph asked, after a pause, still clinging to a remnant of his grumbling.

"It was they who brought me, I think."

"You had better take care."

"I'll look out when I see danger ahead," Felix answered, looking frankly at his friend.

They had turned from the table, and seated themselves at the window; the cigars which had been promised were produced, and each was puffing meditatively.

"Shall I light up," Felix asked, "or do you prefer this dim illumination—it's just possible to fill your glass without spoiling this fine cover?" He pushed the decanter towards his guest.

"This, by all means; we get a benefit from the Puerta, and can see without being seen."

"We can hear, too, under the same happy conditions, it would seem," said Felix.

The room they occupied was divided from another on the same floor by a folding-door, from behind which there now came a sound of voices—that of the landlord, very polite, but apparently not encouraging; that of an Englishman, cold, clear, and high-pitched.

"I wish to engage this room and the bedroom next it. You understand me? This room and the next."

"Like the rest of his race, this Briton imagines that every one who can't speak his own tongue fluently must necessarily be deaf, as well as hopelessly dull," said Malleson carelessly.

"It is our friend of the red whiskers. It might make one wish to be deaf to hear much of *him*."

"How do you know?"

"I've heard him before," said Felix significantly.

The landlord's tones were now heard once more, deprecating, but firm.

"What's he saying?" Felix asked.

"He says the rooms are already taken."

"Then I hope to goodness the right owner will turn up, and deliver me from this fellow's neighbourhood."

"I mean to have the rooms. I will pay for them; I don't care what they cost. You may tell your señor so," came the deliberate voice, again quenching this hope.

"What a charming specimen of our countrymen!" said Felix, elevating his brows. "It doesn't surprise me that Miss Henshaw showed no urgent desire for his society."

"How did he come on the scene?" Ralph asked.

"He came on the scene just in time to spoil a good story. It's my belief he waited till I had come to the thrilling moment, and then cut in on purpose to annoy me. But he did more than that; he surprised me."

"Truly a wonderful feat."

"Oh, well, you know," said Felix, laughing; "a man with red whiskers isn't such an uncommon spectacle that one need be astonished at it; it was the fellow's abominable coolness that did it. Well, as I was saying, I was telling Miss Henshaw about Brex. You don't remember Brex?"

"No," said Malleson, 'I don't remember Brex. I don't suppose it matters profoundly whether I remember Brex or not."

"Not at all; only he was worth knowing. We were up in the same year, and we did some rather neat things together. I was telling her about the great row at Bradley's supper."

"A nice story for a young lady."

"It's a capital story—a beautiful story; but I won't bother you with it just now."

"All right," said Ralph, "I dare say it will keep," for Felix's tone was doubtful; it was evidently an exercise of self-denial to wrench himself from the memory of that adventure of which Brex was the hero.

"It's worth telling a good story to Miss Henshaw," he went on between his puffs; "she is such a splendid listener. I like a girl to look interested when one talks to her."

"Perhaps your neighbour does, too."

Ralph smiled to himself. It amused him to see how Felix, having the ball in his hands,

played with it, with what a zest he tossed it about, how unwilling he was to let it go.

"I don't know what he may like; I know what I should like to give him. I shall advise him to take a few lessons in manners before he presumes to address a lady. Just when I reach the critical moment in my story, our friend ruthlessly destroys the whole beautiful structure with a stroke of his fat hand. Yes, a fat hand in a very tight glove comes between me and Miss Henshaw, and a voice—you heard it just now, only you can add a shade or two of impertinence if you like—claims her as an old acquaintance. He had the coolness to say he was glad to see she was enjoying herself so much, and added something about a promise which he had taken care not to forget. Oh, very fine courtly manners!"

"Then he is an old friend?"

"Acquaintance, I should say. There was not much friendliness in Miss Henshaw's face. The red-whiskered one took it passively enough; but I imagine he must privately have felt rather bad under the look she gave him."

"What is he like? I hardly saw him," said Malleson wonderingly, searching his memory.

"I shouldn't call him handsome," said Felix. "To be frank, I should call him ugly. Not

that I blame him for that; it is the privilege of our sex. I blame him only for abusing it."

"And then?" said Malleson moodily.

"And then I was about to remark to our friend that we could dispense with his company without breaking our hearts, but Miss Henshaw stopped me. She begged me to go for Miss Ouvry, and I went for Miss Ouvry. They left the room together."

"I don't half like it," said Ralph, knocking the ash off his cigar. "I don't like it at all. You saw how the mother received him? Well, it is no business of ours, but I forboded annoyance when they came here. We'll be brought into this, you will see; that is to say, you will, and I'll have to pull you out again."

"Very likely; it has happened before. You describe our respective parts quite correctly."

"So you have made up your mind, have you?"

"I didn't know I had," said Felix meekly; "but if you say so it must be true."

Ralph took one or two turns up and down. Then he paused and put his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Felix, lad," he said, with more tenderness than he often cared to show, "you must take care of yourself in that quarter."

"Dear old mentor, I'll take care, never fear," said Félix, lightly.

"She is very pretty and very attractive."

"Very."

"But you see the sort of people she is mixed up with. I don't know whose fault it is, but there has been something radically bad in her training. I never liked the mother, but I don't give her credit for anything worse than silliness. It is Philippa's misfortune, poor girl! that she has not had a better guide. If this had happened to one's sister, now, supposing one had a sister——"

"Exactly," said Felix. "I propose to regard Miss Henshaw in the light of a sister, so far, at least, as our red-whiskered friend is concerned."

"But she isn't your sister."

"Who was it suggested the relationship?"

"Well, if it was I, I spoke for myself. You are a boy; you are not to be trusted to make such an experiment."

"I think she would like me best." Felix's eyes twinkled.

"Modest, as usual."

"I am more frivolous; less prudent. There is nothing about me to alarm her."

"And there is about me? Well, at any rate, you may wait till she asks you to become her champion. I fancy she will prefer to arrange this affair herself, unless——"

"Unless?" said Felix quietly.

"Unless there is something more between you than you have told me."

Felix laughed.

"I have not told you much, I think."

"Well, begin now. As a rule, you are not troubled with too much reserve."

"Do I bore you? One must have some one to talk to, you know; and you were always such an excellent listener. I will say that for you, old Ralph, you never worry a fellow with interruptions."

"I am listening now."

"Oh, about the 'something more'? Well, I don't like to go against your superior wisdom; you may be right."

"Come," said Ralph, "if that is all, there isn't much danger."

"Danger!" cried Felix in mock amazement; "and this from the man who has told me a thousand times that love is to be the making of me!"

> "Aimer, c'est le grand chose,
> Qu 'importe la mai——"

"Stop, you impertinent boy! none of your cynical French poetry here. Love, yes; but what do you know about love? You haven't mastered the alphabet; it's too high a thing for you yet. You know nothing about it."

"I will take lessons from you, my mentor."

"Ah," said Ralph, pacing the room, "not from me. It will come some day, I suppose; and then there will be hope for you. In the mean time, I must let you take your chance, and amuse yourself with the imitation. You always took everything pretty hot when you were a child, and I had the looking after you to do—measles, and all the rest of it. But you got over those youthful maladies quickly; you will get over this, too."

"But, in the first place, there is the infection," said Felix, "and I feel no bad symptoms. I only said you might be right—in deference to your wisdom; but, O Philosopher! you may be wrong—for once. I'll examine myself, if you like, and report."

"Mind I say nothing against her," said Malleson hastily. "There is a great deal that is very charming about her. She has the making of a fine woman in her if she were in good hands. We have no business to discuss her."

"Exactly," said Felix gravely. "She is a lady for whom I have the greatest respect. She is my very kind friend. At this moment my imagination refuses to go further."

"Well, well, don't give it too much rein," said Malleson smiling, as he rose to go. "You boys, if you would only learn of older people,

but you won't, I suppose. Don't do anything rash. Do you hear me?"

"I will be discretion's self," said Felix. "I will even promise not to take undue advantage of our friend's tempting nearness. As a proof of my prudence, you see, I take this key and turn it—so."

"Let me put it in my pocket, and I'll have faith in your prudence."

"I regret to refuse you, but, not being my property, I can't do that; but to satisfy you, I'll put it in my own."

Malleson lit a cigar and went out. As he crossed the lobby he saw luggage being carried into the room adjoining the one he had left—the luggage of an Englishman. The man of the red whiskers had evidently carried his point. Were there other points he meant to carry in the same determined fashion?

He went across the square slowly, seeing nothing of the crowd that still sauntered over the pavements and flitted in and out of the gaily lit café. He was thinking a little of Felix and a great deal of Deonys. He did not wish the boy to fall in love with Philippa; and yet it would be a marvel if he escaped. He had himself at one time felt something of her power, and he knew it to be great. Yet he was used to the spectacle of Felix in love, and

he foresaw no greater danger than before in this new fancy. He must take his chance. He could dismiss Felix thus lightly from his thoughts, because the most urgent of them were given to Di. Here, indeed, he was quick enough to fear danger. The boy could take care of himself, but he could not bear that any shadow, however faint, of what was less than open and honourable and pure should fall upon her youth and her innocence. He would shield her if he could, even if to do it he must be cruel. He glanced up at her window, lit and curtained now. He did not know of the sad little vigil she had been keeping all alone an hour or two ago, or he might have been tempted, late though it was, to go and comfort her. Well, at least to let her feel that he was there, to fill up her dull moments, to be her friend when others might seem to fail her.

What folly was there not in his thoughts—what folly! Was this the man who had been so wise—so paternal in his advice to Felix? Yet, as he turned away from her lighted window he said, gently enough—

"God bless you, my good little girl!"

CHAPTER X.

"This is not love; but love's firs flush, in youth
Most common. . . .
And you yourself will smile at your own self,
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life
To one more fitly yours."

FOR one or two days after this nothing more was seen of the stranger whose sudden appearance had caused Philippa so much mental disturbance.

But, if invisible, he was not inaudible. Felix took a whimsical interest in listening to his movements; to his orders, given in that high, level voice, that it was impossible to ignore. He made it his business to ascertain how often and at what times this neighbour of his became one of the little family party across the square. Having nothing else that he cared to do, he found the following up of this little tragedy, or comedy, whichever it was, amusing enough. All his observations were, sooner or later, imparted to Malleson, who found less opportunity or less inclination for such investigations. He

had always told everything to his cousin, who listened for the most part with grim indulgence, but at this time he showed less than his usual patience.

He was pretty certain to be visited by Felix every day, for the sight-seeing had come to an abrupt conclusion, and that young man had a large capital of superfluous leisure to draw on.

"The plot thickens," he said one night. "Our friend's interviews grow prolonged. Two hours and a quarter at a stretch might satisfy a moderate man; but our friend isn't moderate; he is not satisfied."

"How can you know all this, you absurd boy?" Malleson looked up with a growl from his writing.

"I know it to my cost," said Felix tragically. "The peace and tranquillity I prize before all things are measured out to me by the hour—the sixty odd seconds my neighbour spends in Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room—can you wonder that I hoard them? Let us hope he enjoys himself as much as I do; at any rate, he spares me his raptures; on that point I acquit him."

"I should suppose he was hardly likely to share his happiness, even with you," said Ralph sarcastically.

"No," said Felix. "You are right, as usual.

He reserves me as the recipient of his woes; he shares his dissatisfaction with me in the most liberal and impartial fashion; he even takes peculiar pains to emphasize it, in case that slim partition should put me to a disadvantage."

"Felix," said Malleson, throwing down his pen, "when are you going to begin to do anything? I don't speak of your allowing me to do anything."

"My dear fellow," said Felix with fine gravity, "I consider I am doing a great deal."

"A great deal of idle folly."

"That's as you like to take it, my mentor. I should call it hard work,"

"This is none of your business," said Malleson, pushing aside his papers, and leaning back in his chair.

"I consider it very much my business. I'm not for a moment allowed to forget the share our friend proposes I should take in his affairs. Now, to-day he gave me to understand that he felt on rather better terms with the world, and that pleased me, naturally, because I had the ordering of the lunch that soothed his ruffled feelings."

"You!"

"Yes, I. Why not? It is no new thing, is it, to discover that the road to a man's good nature lies through his appetite?"

"I don't see what concern you have with his food."

"Just this. Mrs. Henshaw, as I dare say you know, gets her daily supplies from the hotel. When she came she was kind enough to trust me with the ordering of the matter, and the keeping of the people up to the mark—no such easy business, I can tell you. Well, it amuses me to experiment on my partner. Once I put him through a course of native dishes, with a liberal flavour of garlic, but, by Jove! I won't try that in a hurry again!"

"You punish others as well, I should say."

"No, I think not. Women have no discrimination; and besides, they pick like birds. To-day I managed to suit his fancy better; but I don't mean to tickle his palate every day, I can tell you!"

"Do you mean to say he takes his meals there every day?" said Malleson, betrayed into momentary curiosity.

"One or other of them, every day. It isn't difficult to find out at which of them he means to honour Mrs. Henshaw with his company, and to arrange accordingly."

"All this is quite unworthy of you," said Malleson, rising and beginning to pace the bare, untidy room.

"My dear old mentor, the end justifies the means."

"What end?"

"You, who are behind the scenes, and dipped in ink, as it were, must know that it is a fixed and unalterable statute that every travelling Briton shall write a book for the enlightenment of his fellow Britons. I must obey this law of the Medes and Persians; I, too, must write my book."

"That's all stuff!"

"Now, I shouldn't have thought you would have taken it that way—you, a reviewer and criticiser of the mass of literature we are compelled to add to our country's stores—but one can never tell."

"Felix," said Malleson impatiently, plunging his hands in his pockets, "do, my dear fellow, be serious for a moment. It is all very well to amuse yourself, but there is such a thing as knowing when to stop."

"If you could impress that on my partner," murmured Felix.

"As I said before, all this is none of your business, and I see no good that can come of this whim of yours for following up the man, whoever he may be. Much better let it alone. In fact, I don't like it."

"I do," Felix again said softly to himself.

"And what is more, she won't like it either."

"Oh yes, she will."

Felix planted his two elbows on the table and looked at his cousin steadily.

"Look here," he said, "you'll admit that I know more about women than you do. I've studied them."

Ralph did his best not to laugh.

"Pray, what conclusion have you arrived at?" he asked.

"They require some one to look after them. They think they can stand alone and manage their own affairs, but they can't; they want one of us to help them."

"And you propose to manage Miss Henshaw's affairs for her?"

"I'm here if she wants me," he answered modestly; "and I think she will want me."

"From what I know of her I think she is very well able to take care of herself," Malleson said with a touch of contempt. "You will share the usual fate of meddlers."

"The man is a brute," said Felix calmly, ignoring this prophecy. "I quite understand how it is. She has been led into giving him a promise, to which he is mean enough to hold her, and she doesn't see her way out of it. Girls have a magnificent standard of honour;

they would rather be miserable than break their word."

Ralph looked at him, but he said nothing. Did he really believe that Philippa Henshaw was endowed with this fine sensitiveness, this alertness of conscience, that she would embrace misery rather than fall short of the truth? As he looked at the frank, open young face, his own softened. If the boy believed it, he was not the one to disturb his faith. Distrust would come soon enough.

"I've got to go South next week," he said. "You may as well come with me. I don't want you, you know, but you will be out of mischief. The weather is good enough yet, and I promise you more amusement than you will get out of this affair."

"Can't." Felix shook his head. "Greatly honoured, profoundly sorry, and all the rest of it. But think what an opportunity I should miss; my public would never forgive me for losing so fine a chance of describing the Briton abroad. To hit him off well might make a man's reputation. Anything else to oblige, but this is really impossible."

"I haven't asked anything else of you," said Ralph, fuming with vexation. "I don't know why I bother myself with you at all."

"I'm sure I don't know either," Felix an-

swered, with more feeling than he cared to show, "except that you always were tremendously good to me, from the days when you used to lecture me on my incorrigible behaviour and wind up with a handsome tip. I was a horrid little beast in those days. I suppose you don't mind my saying now that I liked the tip best?"

"A hint that I may as well shut up. Give me a light, and let us talk of something else. This pet subject of yours leaves a bad taste in one's mouth."

"Agreed. There," said Felix, taking a whiff, "that disposes of our friend. Now, since you are in such a virtuous mood, will you take a look at these letters, and give me the benefit of your ripe experience? I find the postman is an institution one can't hope to escape, even here."

"Hope to escape! Boy, you are not to be trusted to manage your own affairs."

"Exactly what I think. I am handing them over to you."

"You ought to be poor—like me; then, perhaps, you might do something," said Ralph grimly.

"Ah! then I should work tremendously—like you," Felix retorted with laughing eyes. "Since you are so in love with labour aren't

you obliged to me for filling up your odd moments?"

"Here, hand them over, I'd be glad enough to find something in them that compelled your return home, young Felix; but there seems no chance of anything so good."

"No chance at all; my valuable presence is not required, as you will see for yourself. I'll take a look at the night while you digest the papers."

He went out and down the long stair to the narrow street in which Malleson lived. It was dark, the lamps were few and their light uncertain, but a pace or two took him to a broad and bright thoroughfare; one of the many arteries that lead to the great heart of the city.

Felix sauntered on slowly, his head well up, his bearing easy and careless; a handsome young fellow, well content with himself, and not without a robust interest in all that went on about him. He had already forgotten the business which he had slipped so easily from his own shoulders on to those of his cousin, and this out of no special desire to escape his obligations. It was an old habit to lean on Malleson —a habit which the other had not specially discouraged, for there was, after all, something lovable about the lad. He was not more selfish or less thoughtful than other young men; he

was capable of emotions more vivid and passionate than this mere making the best out of what befell him, which had satisfied him hitherto. But he was incomplete, undeveloped, a mere chrysalis unsummoned as yet to soar. That he could do much the friends who cared enough about him to think the matter out, were well assured; that he had done so little harm, seeing him to be rich and his own master, was surely to his credit.

These, be it understood, were not his own reflections about himself. Introspection is seldom honest enough to be of much avail, and he had besides "a native incapacity to moralize;" they were rather those of his cousin left behind to do his thinking for him. Felix's imagination had gone back quite naturally to his neighbour. He had a fine curiosity about him and his motives, rendered the more acute by his strong liking for Philippa. It need hardly be told that his feet involuntarily led him to the street that ran under her windows. He had not seen her since their sudden parting in the museum; it was but a day or two ago, but time refuses now and then to be measured by hours. It was an age, he told himself, and naturally enough, this too, was scored against the stranger, whose account was swelling.

He had barely reached the entrance to her

house when two figures stepped forth from it together and in talk with each other. He paused in surprise, for the lamplight revealed the faces of Mr. Ouvry and his, as yet, nameless neighbour. They presented a contrast: Mr. Ouvry was at any time a man to be looked at twice; he walked with an air of bland dignity, a serene consciousness of possessing good parts and an unimpeachable character; of being a person whom it was well worth your while to know. His companion, on the other hand, was short and squat, with shoulders too broad for his height, and features chiefly remarkable for all absence of comeliness. He moved like a man who had been too much in a hurry all his life to have time to cultivate any graces. People instinctively turned out of his way as he brushed past with little ceremony.

"Commercial," said Felix, sauntering slowly behind and making his observations. "Cotton or tallow, or possibly beer."

It must not be supposed that he despised trade; he had a great respect for it in the abstract, he only objected to it in the person of this stranger. He was occupied with a great wonder—"What can tallow or beer and dilettantism and do-nothing-ism have in common?" He kept them in sight till they had crossed the Puerta del Sol and entered the café, but he did

not follow them further. Malleson's warnings were less needed than he supposed; young Felix had the instincts of a gentleman, and knew where to draw the line.

As he turned to retrace his steps along the Preciados, he entertained a half-formed purpose of running up the well-known stair. It was not too late to make a call, and the coast was now clear. The attractions of the café Fornos might be safely counted on to detain his rival for an hour at least—time enough to see Philippa and assure himself that their old friendliness remained undisturbed, in spite of their embarrassing parting.

He was turning in lazily, so as not even to himself to seem too impatient to put this plan into execution, but he had hardly taken a step or two, when he was again arrested, by the sound of voices, English voices, one sharp, the other pleading.

"Things have come to a pretty pass if that's what you call the new manners," said the first speaker angrily. "'Not at home'!—when I saw her with my own eyes through the crack of the door, all her length on the sofa! I wonder what my mother would have said if any Gordon of us all had refused to see the poorest body that was civil enough to inquire for our health? Why couldn't she have said she was indisposed

for company? There would have been some honesty, at least, in that."

"Oh, but it would have sounded rude; she would not like to hurt our feelings, and she could not know that we had brought our caps and meant to stay to tea," said Miss Piper, half-fearful at her own boldness while she spoke.

"Rude! Do you mean to tell me you put soft speaking before the truth?"

"Oh, no, indeed, Miss Barbara," said the little spinster with tremulous eagerness; "as a clergyman's sister and daughter, I hope I love the truth. But I think—I believe—oh, I never could explain things, but the words mean something else, I have been told——"

"Something else!" said Miss Barbara with fine scorn. "'Not at home,' means out of the house, unless the English tongue has lost its sense since I learned it. You'll be telling me next it was some other woman I saw lying on the sofa——"

"Oh, Miss Barbara, do you see that shadow!" cried Miss Piper, fear emboldening her to interrupt her companion, "there in the corner? Look, it is moving!"

"Well, why shouldn't it move?" said Miss Barbara a little contemptuously. "What is there to be afraid of in a man? You've seen one before, I suppose."

"And this one is a friend," said Felix, coming into the circle of light. "Miss Piper, forgive me for alarming you, but, as Miss Barbara says, I really am quite harmless. Miss Gordon, let me take that basket from you. I'll take most tremendous care of it, I promise you."

But Miss Barbara declined this offer.

"I'm glad you are not too fine to be seen with a parcel," she said, "but I can't give you mine, for I've got my mother's China shawl pinned up in it, and I never trust it to any hands but my own. Here is Miss Piper with plenty to carry. She'll be glad of your help."

But the more timid lady could not be induced to relinquish even one of the many little packages with which she was laden, though their number kept her in constant fear of losing one. She was eager in her thanks, but she kept Miss Barbara's gaunt person between her and Felix, of whose airy ways she was secretly mistrustful.

"You were going up there?" said Miss Barbara, who had not moved on.

"Yes," he answered, "I had thought of going, but now, if you will allow me, I'll walk home with you instead."

"There is no call for you to come with us."

"Such a protection—a gentleman—the dark road," murmured Miss Piper.

"I've yet to see the man, or ghost either, that would frighten me," Miss Barbara went on, ignoring the interruption; "but, if you care to come, we'll be glad of your company. Only it's like enough they would be 'at home' to you."

"I won't give them the option, since they were ungracious enough to decline your society," he answered lightly. "If they let me in it would be because I'm not important enough to be shut out. They are accustomed to me; I'm like a bit of the furniture, to be used or not used, as it happens."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Miss Barbara gravely. "I hope you haven't fallen into their ways."

"Not into the way of being anything but charmed when my friends are good enough to look me up," he answered gaily; "but, unfortunately, you see, Miss Barbara, I'm a lonely and forlorn bachelor, without a house to ask you to, else, if you had honoured me by coming to tea—— By the way, there's the café. I believe it is quite the thing for ladies to go to it here. Now, if you and Miss Piper could be persuaded——"

"I can get my tea at home," said Miss Barbara, grim, but good-humoured, "and Miss Piper is to take hers with me," she added in

reply to a timidly warning touch on her arm. "The café is no place for old grey heads like ours, and you'll just come with us yourself. I won't say but what it's safer for you to keep on the outside of that door, too," she added, glancing doubtfully at the radiance that the Café Imperial generously shared with the square.

"At this moment," said Felix gallantly, "it pleases me best to be where I am—except for that matter of the tea. That really distresses me."

"If you never have more to trouble you than that, you'll be well off," said Miss Barbara, shaking her head. "Keep your strong words till you need them."

"Deonys pressed us to stay," said Miss Piper, who thought this way of meeting the young man's solicitude rather rude, and who was anxious to show that they were not without resources; "she is always so friendly and companionable."

"Deonys knows what is due to her elders, and she behaves very prettily and nicely to her mother's old friends. I must say that for her." Miss Barbara was stern in her discouragement of that little fiction of equality in years and feelings that it pleased her gentle companion to have faith in. "But the visit was not meant

for her. I'm not over fond of being seen in my neighbour's house at all hours, but when a person says to you, 'Come up some night and take your tea,' who is to guess that the words mean as good as nothing, and that you'll find the door shut in your face?"

"I should interpret them as you do," said Felix, "and resent that shut door frightfully."

"Well, well, I'm an old woman," said Miss Barbara, softening a little now that she had proclaimed her grievance, "and you are not so young, either, Miss Piper; but we have a great deal to learn yet, it seems. I must say the old fashions please me best, and to my thinking, there was more real politeness in my mother's rule than in this fine turning up and down of honest words till you shake all the meaning out of them. There was no keeping of folks hanging on your pleasure then, while you made up you mind whether you were to be in or out. You had to run the minute you were called, without so much as a touch to your hair or your collar, or a peep at the glass. If you were untidy, you might take the more shame to yourself, but it was no reason why your guest should wait your convenience."

"It must have been very bracing," said Felix, "and delightful to be a guest under such circumstances." He smiled as he recalled the

weary moments he had passed in Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room, examining the well-known knickknacks while the lady made an elaborate toilet for his benefit.

"It was honest," said Miss Barbara with emphasis, "and it taught girls tidy ways. There was no lying on sofas or wearing of your dressing-gown all morning, when a neighbour might step in at any moment and spread your idle ways all over the parish."

This eulogy of the good old days carried them safely through the lower parts of the town, and it was still in full course when they reached that higher suburb where both ladies lived. Miss Barbara's two listeners received it very differently. To Miss Piper this code of manners sounded harsh and stern. It belonged emphatically to a past with which she had no sympathy, she who clung so pathetically to the fast-flying present. It confused her simple mind. Why should not Mrs. Henshaw take her ease on the sofa, and decline in any words she chose to minister to her unexpected guests? Miss Piper, who had the gentlest temper in the world, would have trudged many times over the long way, carrying that burden of detached parcels containing her trinkets, her faded flowers and finery, on the chance of being but once admitted behind that shut door. As for Philippa, that

beautiful creature who had promised to be her friend, would she not be equally charming, equally friendly, if she never wore a collar—or, for that matter, a gown at all? But here she lost herself in the perplexity of considering Philippa in this new light, and was suddenly recalled to the present by Felix handing over some of the stray packages she had unconsciously dropped during the argument.

They had reached Mrs. Gordon's door, and Felix was saying good night. He pleaded an engagement, and would not go in.

"It's an honest refusal, I assure you," he said, looking with his frank smile at Miss Barbara's doubtful face. "I left my cousin bothering himself about some business of mine, and must go back to him."

"Well," she said, "I believe you; though I heard enough to-night to make me not so good at believing as I was. Go and do your duty, and don't you fall into their ways. An old woman may say as much as that to a young lad like you without offence. You needn't look at me as if you were shocked, Miss Piper; we're old enough, both of us, to be his grandmother."

"Don't fall into their ways; don't fall into their ways." The words set themselves to a jingling chant as he lit his pipe, and slowly

retraced his steps. Into what ways? Philippa's ways were charming ones, though she had not been brought up in the Spartan school of Miss Barbara, charming in all, save and except in admitting the stranger to her hospitality. That was all that there was to disapprove about her. If she deviated from the truth, he did not know it; he preferred to believe her to be as honest as she was unconventional, as straightforward as she was kind. She never kept him waiting while she studied the subtleties of a toilet. She was always kind to him, not perhaps after the manner of the lady who might have been his grandmother, and who gave him good advice on that plea, but in her own wilful, odd, pleasant fashion. He wished for nothing better or more. The small conventionalities with which Mrs. Henshaw hedged her social life naturally did not trouble him as they troubled Miss Barbara. The phrase which had shocked her he took for what it was worth; it did not seem to him so very dreadful a fiat, unless it happened to be applied to himself. "Not at home" to him; Felix—while yet "at home" to this other man—that, if you like, would be a serious affair. But it had not come to that yet; this was a "way" into which Mrs. Henshaw was not likely to fall, so far as he was concerned. He fancied himself to be of some

little importance to her, of, perhaps, some very little importance to Philippa, too. She liked him better, for instance, than she liked the commercial person with the red whiskers. To be sure, that was not a matter to be greatly proud of; to be preferred to such an one was not a distinction to make one vain. Still, this man from nowhere had undoubtedly some advantages on his side. He had been invited —or had invited himself—to lunch or dinner at the Preciados every day since he came, while he, Felix, had not shared any of those little meals that he had so willingly undertaken to arrange with his landlord. He had not simply given a general order; he had, now and then, if not always, selected the little menu carefully, so that Philippa might not miss the sweet things and the fruit she preferred, and all this that another might share the feast to which he was not bidden!

His thoughts had worked themselves round once more to the old subject which already occupied too urgent a place in the foreground of his mind. He had tired in his day of some things, but he was not yet wearied of wondering at or conjecturing the relations between this beautiful girl, who was his friend, and this man for whom he had so fine a contempt. It was a subject full of danger to him. Ralph's fears

were not altogether groundless. Young Felix was more nearly ready to love Philippa than he had ever been in all the years he had known her, now that her cause seemed to need a champion. He had a good deal of native chivalry and of an Englishman's hatred of anything that savours of oppression, and he had a shrewd guess that some pressure was being put on the girl. It was impossible that she could consent to receive this man's attentions willingly; she had shown all too plainly how much she revolted from him. Ralph might have foreboded further trouble ahead could he have read his young cousin's mind as he paced the gaslit streets. From commiseration, from sympathy, it is such an easy step to something that is counted for love; that passes for it until, too late, light comes and the awakening from a dream.

As yet, salvation from such a fate was very possible. He had but thought with a quicker throb of his pulse that she was somehow suffering, and that he was called on to be her deliverer; but the very putting of the matter in plain words to himself seemed to bring a great enlightenment. He could not have told why, but all at once he felt a strong disinclination to return to his cousin and to that matter of business that had been his excuse to Miss Barbara. He went back to his hotel.

He was half-way upstairs when a new idea came to him, and he turned and went back to the hall. As a preliminary step towards the championship of Philippa, he called a waiter and asked him to bring the visitor's book. There, among several unreadable Spanish hieroglyphics, he soon discovered what he wanted.

"James P. Ferryman, Liverpool."

It was written so plainly, in a clear business hand, with a little flourish at the tail of the "n," that it seemed to stand alone on the page.

"A cotton lord," said Felix, shutting the book with a bang, and running lightly up the steps. "Nobody who hadn't signed a good many big checks in his day would think of cultivating such a tremendous signature. James P. Ferryman, your little dodges shall be discovered and circumvented, or I shall know the reason why."

He seemed to himself to have got on a great way already towards the defence of Philippa. It is something to know your adversary's name.

His room was in darkness, except for the borrowed light from the lamps outside. On his table there gleamed a little patch of whiteness, on which his eye lit at once. It was a note—a small three-cornered note, such as he had handled before. It was in Philippa's writing. He took it up with a new feeling of mingled

eagerness and pleasure. She was about, then, to appeal to him for help. He carried it to the window, too impatient to wait for the kindling of his lamp. Two lines, that was all.

"Please don't come to our house just now—for a few days. I beg this of you as the greatest favour.—P. H."

Philippa had scrawled it in haste, obeying the impulse of her hurt pride. Did she not wish the possible lover of to-morrow to look on at her struggle for freedom from the discarded lover of yesterday? Whatever she wished or did not wish, he had bound himself by that vow of allegiance to obey her. She had forbidden him to go to her; he would not go. She could not forbid him to think of her, and it was probable that, following the instinct of human nature, she would occupy his imagination as she had not yet occupied it.

He looked at the little note gravely, and he did not tear it up. He opened the French window, and stepped out on the balcony. There were still people walking about on the pavement below, but not so many as an hour before. The shops were shut. There was a faint, struggling moon that now and then appeared, showing the light surface of the fountain, and was again, next moment, hidden by the ragged, flying clouds. There was another

light besides that of the lamps. It advanced slowly; it was old Domingo who carried it—he of the hooded cloak and long staff of office.

Felix noticed all these things, but without his usual alertness of impression; he was thinking of something else.

CHAPTER XI.

"I will bestow a breakfast to make you friends."

"BUT, father, that man!"

Mr. Ouvry was reading. He looked up with an exaggerated air of patience; he had supposed the subject at an end. He spoke wearily.

"I have already explained that I have invited Mr. Ferryman to lunch with us. Perhaps I didn't make my meaning plain."

"Oh yes, father," said Di distressfully; "it was not that."

"It doesn't seem to me such a great thing to propose in my own house," he said, looking at the wall as if in mild appeal. "A little act of hospitality to a stranger and a countryman. I am afraid, my child, you are a little selfish."

"Oh, padre!" she began, but she could get no further. Something seemed to choke her. Could it be true that she was selfish; and yet, could her father really find pleasure in the

company of this stranger? That seemed most difficult of all to believe.

"You'll notice that I said luncheon, Di," he went on, still in that patient, explanatory tone. "Quite an informal meal. You are a young housekeeper, and I don't wish to tax your powers too severely. A few little dishes, simple and well-cooked: that can't be very difficult to arrange."

"No, father." She came over and knelt down beside him, putting her hand on the worn leather cover of the chair. "It is not the trouble, you know, that would be nothing—nothing at all; it was only——"

"Only what, my child?"

"That I did not like him, this Mr. Ferryman. I saw him. And Philippa dislikes him, too, very much. She can't bear him. She thought he had no right to come."

"Philippa is a foolish girl, I'm afraid." Mr. Ouvry smiled indulgently, and patted the flushed cheek. "You and she are not so very wise; you must allow older people to judge. Mrs. Henshaw will come and support you; and you had better ask your friend, too. I dare say, in spite of her little prejudice, she will join us. That will make it all right, won't it?"

"Philippa won't come," said Di gravely.

"Well, well, one must make some allowance

for a pretty young lady's fancies. One must not expect too much from young people. But I thought your friend was a sensible girl, and not to be repelled by an unattractive appearance merely."

"It isn't his appearance only; that wouldn't matter, though he is ugly."

"I don't deny that there is a little lack of refinement; but one does not look for that in commercial circles." Mr. Ouvry shook his head softly, as who should say, "I am not exacting. I do not expect every one to reach my standard. I find Mr. Ferryman a person of great intelligence, however—quite remarkably well informed on many points."

Di listened in silence. Perhaps she had misjudged and been too hasty. It was true that she was not very wise; she was young and had seen nothing at all, yet she was struggling all the while with a feeling of disloyalty to Philippa. It seemed as if she was deserting her.

"You might drop a line to Malleson," her father went on. "I'm afraid we can't venture on Major Gibbs; no, we must not think of it; but Ralph will come."

"He is out of town," said Di quickly. "He went to Seville yesterday. I know, because I got a message with some books he sent me to read."

"Then I am afraid we have come to the end of our list. Brander hasn't returned yet, nor Carteret. Our little colony is sadly reduced this autumn. 'Well, it will give you the less trouble, my child. You can talk over a few little dishes with Concha, and let me know what you decide on. I'll see to the wine, of course."

"Very well, padre, I'll try to please you. To-morrow, you said?"

"Yes, to-morrow. You see there was nothing to be afraid of, was there?"

He placed his white, shapely hand on her little brown one, with a kind of playful pity. She was timid, but a good child. She stooped and kissed it softly, but she said nothing.

Felix Chester had not been named among the proposed guests. With every wish to be unselfish, Di could not induce her lips to utter his name. It would be going over to the enemy, indeed, to ask the young man to break bread with his rival—with the man, who, in some strange, unexplained fashion, held Philippa in his power.

Mr. Ouvry had not forgotten him, but there were reasons why he should be speedily rejected—excellent reasons. He should come another day with Major Gibbs and Barker, who was still at the sea; but with Mr. Ferryman, no. The

little party was got up to oblige Mr. Ferryman and Mrs. Henshaw, and it must pass off pleasantly, that was quite essential. Nothing of this was said to Di, and the talk ended with that little caress, which was good-humouredly received.

She rose and went to the kitchen where Concha reigned. The old woman was busy among her pots and pans, her gown tucked up, and a bright handkerchief tied under her withered chin. The afternoon sun streamed into the little room; the window was wide open; the soft air stirred the gay yellow papers that fluttered from every shelf. A stray beam smote the great red jar full of water that stood in one corner. Di went up to it, it was nearly as tall as herself; she put her hot hands against it and felt the sudden coolness run through all her veins.

Concha, with much show of zeal, was clattering among the pans and the rough clay, classic pots. Now and again she would stop to raise her hands and exclaim, with vehemence, "Holy Madonna! what laziness! A laziness to make one die! An hour, two hours, to go to the market and return; that is what one needs nowadays. And a stupidity! Never the thing that one orders, that one commands her to bring. It is well that the señorita has me, otherwise she

would starve; she would perish while that idle one creeps through the streets."

Deonys smiled. It was only Concha scolding the absent Pepita, who loved the hot bright streets and the gay shops. It was the one luxury of Concha's life to scold the little black-eyed maid. We have all our favourite indulgences; nobody minded Concha's sharp tongue, which would indeed have been missed in the house.

Deonys went and perched herself on a corner of the low table near the window. She began to talk of stews and sauces, of pimiento and tomatoes, and other cunning messes, beguiling the old woman into a vehement interest.

"And is it for the señorito, the impetuous young man with the yellow hair, who is the lover of the señorita downstairs—this feast?" she demanded, pausing in a dramatic attitude with a bit of pottery of antique shape in one hand.

"No, no, no," said Di, shaking the bread she had been idly crumbling out on the sill. "It is for—a friend of the padre's. The señorito is not coming at all."

She ran away before the old woman could ask any more questions. She hated to talk about it, and yet she must go and tell Philippa; that was certain. If she must play hostess to this man, Philippa must be told.

She had not seen her for a week or more, not since the moment of this unwelcome stranger's arrival. She had been afraid to meet him; afraid, somehow, even to go down the broad stair in case he should be ascending it. The thought of him filled her with a nameless, shuddering disgust.

She threw a light shawl over her head, and ran down quickly, as if there were danger in every lurking shadow. She had planned that she would ask for Philippa, and contrive to see her alone. Blake with the honest, severe face would understand. But this little diplomatic scheme came to nothing, for Mrs. Henshaw herself was hovering in the lobby and opened the door.

"Ah, it is you," she said, with a little sigh of relief, as if she had dreaded another visitor. "Come in, come in, my dear."

Her tone was kinder than usual, and there was a something softened and chastened in her whole appearance; it was as if her self-confidence had somehow oozed out. There was a difference in her very walk. The old rustle and sweep of her curling skirts were absent; the wonderful and subtle arrangements of her toilet, that had been an astonishment to Deonys, were banished. She wore a straight plain gown, and her hair was smoothed under a cap. For the first time, now

that youthful disguises were abandoned, one discovered what a handsome woman she was.

"I came to see Philippa."

"Ah, yes; but I have a word to say to you first. I thought of sending for you."

Deonys could do nothing but follow. She was led, without time to hesitate, into the salon with the green and gilded chairs. Philippa's corner by the window was empty.

Mrs. Henshaw sat down on a straight seat with an uncomfortable knobby back, and motioned Deonys to the sofa. It was as if she had said, "There are still luxuries in life for you; for me these things are over."

Di felt ill at ease. She had never before been so afraid of this good lady.

"Ah, what I have suffered—what I have suffered!" she began, pressing her handkerchief against her eyes. They were dry, but they looked worn and anxious, and the lines under them were dark.

"Have you been ill?" Di asked with sympathy.

"Ill? no." She removed her handkerchief. "I have my usual health. I have been able for my duties. The body obeys, but the mind and the heart—ah, it is there that one suffers."

"Philippa," Deonys began timidly. She did not know what to make of all this.

"She is well, she is not suffering. It is I on whom all the burdens fall."

"I am sorry you are in trouble."

Di felt this to be a very lame and halting reply, but, though she guessed at the source of the lady's distress, she shrank from listening to the recital of it.

"It is I on whom all the burdens fall," Mrs. Henshaw repeated. "I did it for her; and now she turns from me! You will speak to her? She will see you. My child confides in a stranger, and turns from her mother. And yet I am not ill—oh, no, I am not ill. And what does it matter that I suffer!" she cried shrilly. "Who will care?"

"Philippa will care; and we shall all be sorry. Papa, too, he is your old friend."

"Ah, your papa," said Mrs. Henshaw suddenly. She looked up with a strange, sharp light in her anxious eyes. "But for him—well, well, I can be silent; I can suffer in silence," she broke off. Then she added, with new vehemence, "But you must speak to Philippa; it is your duty. If you knew all, you would see it to be the least—the very least, that you ought to do. And to think that it is you to whom my child turns rather than to her own mother." She looked at the girl almost angrily.

"Philippa has told me nothing, nothing at

all," said Deonys, standing up. She was pale and there was a proud look on her sweet face. "You ought not to say I have taken her away from you, because it is not true."

"But you will go to her? You will make her listen to you?"

She passed by the girl's hurt words as if she never heard them. What cared she for reproaches so long as she gained her end?

"I will go to her because I love her."

"Yes, yes; I am sure you do. She has been very kind to you. She has made quite a friend of you; and if you persuade her to do as I wish, that will be a very good way to show that you—that you wish to help us all. One ought to be ready to sacrifice something for a friend," she ended, lighting on a moral maxim to strengthen her argument, and then continued—

"If I talk to her it may not be to say what you would like. But I think I understand. You wish her to give up this—gentleman." Di got out the word after a moment's hesitation.

"She think she is bound to him, I know; but that cannot make it right for her to marry him, since she dislikes him so much."

This little speech was delivered with some cheerfulness. If this was to be her mission she would undertake it almost willingly.

"Since you wish it so much, she will consent," she added confidently.

Mrs. Henshaw stared at her in dumb surprise.

"Give him up!" she cried at last. "Do you know what you are talking about, or are you only trying to frighten me?" She took hold of the girl's wrist in a grasp that hurt. "It is no time to joke," she said; "it is very bad taste. She must consent. It is the only way by which we can be saved. If there was another way, do you think I should take this, after what I have endured the last few days? Ah, if I had had my own that I was robbed of—yes, robbed of—this would never have happened, and my child would have loved me still. But I have kept silence. Do you know what that means—the bearing of a great wrong in silence?"

"Let me go; please, let me go," said Deonys, struggling to withdraw her hand. "I don't want to understand. I don't want to listen to anything more.

"You must," said Mrs. Henshaw more quickly, yet with firmness. "It is you who must save Philippa and me. It is only justice."

"I have nothing to do with it," she answered a little indignantly, longing to escape, yet held by the vehement eagerness of the speaker.

"Yes, you have. Philippa will be guided by

you. My poor child will do what you tell her. And it is no such hard fate. If she is unhappy it will be her own fault. People marry for position every day, and she will be rich, and get her own way. But the sooner she yields the better, for he is a man who will not forget her obstinacy; he will remember it, and let her see that he remembers it."

Deonys looked at her companion in amazement. Could she have heard aright? It was as if a window had opened suddenly on the ugly and dark side of the world, hitherto all unsuspected. Could there be women—mothers who were wicked like this?

"And you want her to marry a man who is like that?" she said, staring at her. "You, who are her mother?"

Mrs. Henshaw's anxious eyes fell uneasily before that look. It was so open, so fearless, so astonished; that was the worst—it was so astonished.

"What else is there for her to do?" she asked with a faint touch of shame.

"How can I tell? She can wait, I suppose. Why need she marry at all?"

"You girls are so romantic," Mrs. Henshaw spoke peevishly. "I was so once, too, in my day," she sighed; "but one lives down these things. There are other and stronger reasons

for marriage than love. You will understand it some day. None of your friends married for love. Not your mother, not any one."

"Don't talk of mamma, not you—not here," said Di, lifting one hand as if to ward off the words. "She was good."

"Do you know her story?"

"I will not hear it from you," Di said bravely, remembering her father's warning with a sudden sense of pain. If there was any story to tell, these were not the lips to repeat it.

"I don't propose to talk of her," Mrs. Henshaw answered coldly. "The subject is not a pleasant one to me; and, as I told you, I can keep silence. We were speaking of Philippa. Will you go to her?"

"I will go to her; but I can't talk to her as you wish. If she asks me, I will tell her that it is wrong, sinful, to marry any one you do not love. That is what I shall tell her."

She went away quickly, waiting for no rejoinder, and, somehow, the room was empty before the unready answer came to Mrs. Henshaw's lips. For a moment, a little moment, it seemed as if this young girl with the steadfast eyes had truth on her side; as if nothing else in all the world were worth bartering for love. There came with that, to this lady, a vision of a young face, noble and manly, a face unseen for

long years. It looked at her out of the past with a glance almost like that of the girl who had defied her. But visions are fleeting things. Quickly there came between it and her a mist of memories: disappointment, jealousy, long-treasured resentment. No wonder that she cried out bitterly that nobody marries for so slight a thing as love; that Philippa, too, must submit and do what others had to do before her. If she suffered, others had suffered, cried this mother, growing hard again as she paced the long room. Was not she suffering now? and her child, for whose good she had worked, had turned against her. Philippa must yield; she had lost the ally on whose help she had counted, but she could fight alone. Philippa must surrender.

Di went straight to her friend. Her eyes were blazing with a new light. Philippa was in bed, but sitting up with a shawl pinned about her. She was busy examining some trinkets, which she was taking one by one out of an old box; but Di noticed nothing of this.

"Oh, Philippa," she said, "you won't promise; you won't let them make you promise!"

Philippa laughed.

"So you have come at last, my pretty one. Did you not think of your poor sick friend till to-day? Why don't you ask after my health?"

"You are not ill," said Di, experiencing a sudden chill. This glowing, beautiful creature did not look like an oppressed maiden tyrannized over by her friends.

"Ill? I am very near it. A day more of this dreadful bed, and I should be a fit subject for your best nurse. Think of mamma insisting on my carrying out the illusion. Wasn't that a cruel turning of the tables? The slops and the gruel took away all the picturesqueness of the situation. They have conquered me. Next week we should have arrived at the drugs and the tonics. That decided matters. Behold me convalescent, Di."

"And what follows?" said Di, with a touch of scorn in her clear voice.

"It follows that I proceed to the drawing-room for change of air, and that I am presently pronounced well enough to receive visitors, you first and dearest of them."

"I can't come."

"You mean you can't come unless you can have me all to yourself? You shall have me all to yourself, Di, every bit of me. We'll not even admit good little Miss Piper to our duet, though we did sign that bond of friendship with her."

"Philippa, I can't understand you," said Di wistfully; "you are too quick for me.

Never mind. I am glad you can be gay; only——"

"Only," said Philippa sadly, "it's a sorry kind of gaiety. Di, Di, you are a girl, too. Don't you understand another girl better than that?"

In a moment Di had come forward and thrown her arms about her friend, tender arms that would cling there in spite of all.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "don't let them make you do things that are not right."

"I have done plenty without coercion." Philippa shook her head. "Don't imagine me an innocent and amiable angel, ready to yield to anybody's dark suggestions. I need only yield to my own to be as bad as possible."

"Then you will not do this thing?"

"If, by 'this thing,' you mean marry that man, I will never do it, never, never!" said Philippa firmly. "Was that what you meant I was to promise?"

"Yes."

"Then I promise it here, now. I promise that no one will make me do it."

"I am glad," said Di simply, yet she sighed. "I have been listening to your mother."

"But not agreeing with her?"

"I told her I would never say you ought to do it."

"Poor mamma," said Philippa lightly; "that was a blow to her. She counted on you to take her side; but you took mine instead, you good little Di."

"I should like best never to have known anything about it," said Di honestly; "but perhaps that is selfish."

It seemed very likely that she might have been selfish, though she had not thought of it till her father had pointed it out.

"Philippa, I must tell you something."

"Yes, do. I want so much to get away from this hateful subject."

"But this is what you will not like."

"I shall like anything better than my own thoughts."

"He is coming to lunch with us to-morrow."

"Who is 'he'?"

"Mr. Ferryman. Papa has asked him."

"Oh, is that all? I knew that. It is part of the plan to get me to consent."

"The padre would have nothing to do with such a plan," said Di, with a touch of pride; "you must not think it."

"My little one," said Philippa, smiling, "he thinks nothing at all, except that I am a very foolish girl to refuse so great an offer."

"He doesn't understand. He means to be kind."

"I know that. I like your father. He thinks perhaps that by his showing some attention to this man, I may be led to think better of him. But nothing will make me do that."

"When you have given him his answer he will go away," said Di soothingly. "And then it will be all as it used to be."

Philippa laughed.

"How little you understand," she said. "My answer won't make him move one step, not one; he will not go away because of that. Perhaps if he got his money back—but I don't know. Oh, Di, I must tell you about it. I didn't mean to worry you with my troubles, but if you only knew what a comfort it is to have some one to talk to again, after the soup, and the gruel, and the lumps in the mattress, and mamma's anxious face and Blake's solemn one!"

She laughed, but there were tears in the bright, beautiful eyes that made Di say quickly, suppressing her dislike—

"Yes, tell me."

"It was two years ago," said Philippa, closing her hand and softly beating time to her words on the coverlet, "two years. I was not a child, you see—indeed, I never had a childhood—I was always grown up, and 'out' ever since I can remember. Well, all that is nothing to the point, except that it will prove to you that

I did the thing with my eyes open. We were living in London then, and to live in London at all one must have money."

"Is every one so rich, then?"

"You must either be rich, or you must pretend to be. If you have only a very little money you may just as well have none at all. That was our case, and the pretending, even if it is ever so well done, only lasts for a time. Besides, we weren't good at it—mamma and I—I will say that for us. We both hated it; and I don't think there were two greater cowards in London that season. But what can one do, Di? One must live; and our money affairs had gone wrong for the time. It was only for the time, but presently people got tired of supporting us on promises, and then—this man came." She paused, and went on hurriedly, "I never cared for money; but there are things one must have, and there was disgrace facing us. You cannot understand it, Di; it is a world removed from anything you have known; but it was an ugly enough alternative. And this man had so much! He was willing and eager to give it, too, only he had his bargain to make."

"That was mean," said Di. She was trying to put herself in the other's place, to argue as Philippa had argued. But on all this shifting ground, where she could find no firm foothold,

it was a comfort to find one point where they could meet. "It was mean and ungenerous."

"The commercial spirit, I suppose," said Philippa bitterly. "Nothing for nothing. He understands how to barter. And he was modest enough then in his demands; he would wait. It was only a promise. Oh, Di, the words were so easily said! I don't think they were even spoken. Just a consenting silence, and there was everything plain and straight and smooth before us."

"He will not keep you to it. He cannot."

"So I thought once. We went away after that, and we travelled everywhere, while he stayed behind in that hateful England. I felt safe.. I thought that the sea would roll between us for ever. Last spring, when we were in London, I was afraid, but he never appeared. Then we came here. It did not seem as if a person who had tallow or beer or soda water, or whatever it is, to manufacture, would care to leave that charming pursuit, even for my sake. And yet, here he is. It's a fine proof of constancy, isn't it, Di?"

"You must pay back the money."

Di slid from the edge of the bed, where she had been seated, and began to pace the room, unconsciously pausing now and again to set the shabby ornaments straight, or to lift the lids

of Philippa's little pots and boxes. She had travelled a long, long way into knowledge in the last hour; it was as if she had suddenly grown old, and had had all her experiences of life crowded into this little space. There was a great deal that she must strive to forget, but in the meantime she could not arrange her thoughts. Something must be done — some plan made to help this other girl, who was her friend.

"My dear," said Philippa, who was watching her with an irrepressible smile, "you will find no hidden treasures. My possessions are all hopelessly paltry; there's nothing that would fetch sixpence at a sale. See, I've been looking over these." She pointed to the trinkets scattered all round her. "I never wear them. But what would be the use of the trifle they would fetch? My grandmother's hair woven into bracelets wouldn't command a handsome sum, or be counted an ornament if anybody could be persuaded to buy them. And where's the money to come from? He will exact his pound of flesh, this merchant in tallow."

"I can't talk about it," Di said, straying back to the bed.

She looked at the trinkets absently. Philippa was touching them slowly. There was, as she

had said, nothing of any value. A string of baby coral, one or two girlish trinkets, some Genoa filigree, and Venice beads.

"It is all as worthless as my life," she said. "I've nothing to sell. I've been bought myself, that is all."

"I can't talk about it," Di repeated. "Something must be done. You must let me go away; I am tired."

"It is I who have tired you with my melancholy tale," said Philippa with compunction. "You will wish you had never seen me."

"No, not that; but indeed I must go."

She sped upstairs, fear lending her wings. She heard the steady pace of a foot that trod the green and gold salon, past which she stole softly, dreading another interview with Mrs. Henshaw. She could talk or listen no more.

Yet there was one little word still to say.

It was evening, and shadow was gaining fast on sunlight in that race which they nightly run. One might almost have fancied that the sounds which rose from the Puerta were less vivacious, less spontaneous, as if the day, too, were tired, as tired as the girl who stood by the window. Outside there was a timid fluttering of wings, a silent appeal of bright bird eyes, but her hands were empty.

"Father," she said by-and-by, "I want to

ask you something. Have I any money—any money that is my own?"

Mr. Ouvry was preparing to go out, to visit the Athenæum and take a glance at the latest scientific journals; he was a patron of literature and science. The question gave him a disagreeable shock, perhaps because it was so unexpected.

"Money of your own?" he repeated. "Have you any wants that I fail to supply?"

"None," she said eagerly. "I have everything I wish. But I thought perhaps——" She faltered. "I did not know, I thought perhaps mamma——"

"Your mother had nothing but what her guardian chose to give her while she lived with him before her marriage, nothing afterwards that she did not owe to me."

He spoke frigidly. He would answer all her questions, but he made it apparent that he strongly disapproved of them.

"Who put this thought into your mind, Deonys?"

"No one," she answered quickly.

He looked at her distrustfully, but it was impossible to doubt the perfect candour of her clear eyes.

"Oh, padre, forgive me. I meant no harm. It was not for myself."

"It is perhaps not well for you to question me," Mr. Ouvry continued; "but I have nothing to conceal. I am a very poor man. I keep nothing for myself, nothing that you do not share. And you shall have it all when I am gone, Deonys." He spoke gently; he recognized the pathos of the situation. "It is not long to wait. I am growing old. You shall have it all then."

"Oh, don't speak like that," said the girl, her tears brimming over.

She sat down in her little low chair, and covered her face with her hands. The wings fluttered nearer now, bold red feet clasped the sill of the window, and impatient beaks made little dabs, pecks and dumb appeals at the glass, but she never lifted her head. Her pets flew home unfed; and the shadows crept up and looked in at her instead. For the race was ended, and night was the victor.

CHAPTER XII.

"A veray parfit gentil knight."

FELIX was on the same day taking an afternoon walk—a young gentleman of leisure, bent on anything that promised to offer some amusement—when his eye lighted on a prominent placard. There, set forth in large capitals, was the announcement of a *función* in the bull-circus. The season of bull-fights was not until spring, but this was a special and separate performance, given on some ground which the advertisement fully explained, but which he failed to comprehend. His Spanish was limited, but the main fact was plain enough. It was also stated that royalty was to grace the show.

He noted the hour carefully, and found that he was just in time to take his place. He made up his mind without difficulty to attend. It was the thing to do, and, in the absence of other interests, he was ready to entertain hospitably

any new sensation. Philippa had forbidden him to go to her, and this privation must be made up for somehow. He was in the mood to believe that the entertainment was specially arranged for his consolation.

The spectacle began at three o'clock, and a little before that hour arrived he had secured his ticket and taken his seat. He had a pleased sense of excitement, as he surveyed the immense crowd that filled the large, low building. Many thousands of people were there—a sea of faces lit with eager expectation, hands gesticulating, voices laughing, shouting, sending greetings across the arena.

Felix felt himself lifted on this wave of enthusiasm. He told himself that it was a happy chance that led his steps to this spot. Among the many holiday-makers he recognized one or two who were unmistakably English. There were ladies of the party; one of them had a note-book, and busied herself with rapid sketching of profiles. The band struck up and discoursed gay music. It was altogether a brilliant gathering—a glimpse of national life it would have disappointed him to miss.

Then the trumpet sounded, and the procession, which is never less than picturesque, began. Felix leaned eagerly forward, and there passed before him a vision of gorgeous colour

and flashing gold and silver: men of proud bearing on horseback and on foot, who bent before the royal seat; the glitter of lances; the noise of music; the slow march of feet. It was like some fairy scene conjured up by an Aladdin's wand; a moment it was there, the next it had vanished. A thrill, which communicated itself to Felix, now passed through the vast company, then every one settled down, and absolute silence prevailed; the business of the hour had begun.

It is no part of this story to describe the horrors of a bull-fight—that spectacle which every tourist feels it to be his duty to see, undeterred by the warnings that are surely not spared him. Felix, who took a most healthy interest in the sports of his native country, was prepared to be critical and judicial, but yet lenient and tolerant towards the practices of this less favoured land. He was destined to remain but a brief time in that mind. By the time the first of the six bulls, that were doomed to die for the amusement of this holiday crowd, had been dragged out of the arena, he had left the circus, horrified, sickened, disgusted, vowing vengeance against Ralph, against Baedeker and Murray, against any one and every one who had not forcibly held him back from witnessing this degrading and brutal exhibition. No words

were strong enough to express his indignation, his sense of contempt for the baseness and ferocity of this national amusement. His head ached, his heart beat in angry throbs; he felt tired, angry, disgusted, all at once, but chiefly disgusted.

He walked almost without thought of where he was going to the Recoletos, and threw himself on a bench under the trees. It was the hour of the evening promenade, and that portion of society that had absented itself from the circus was being driven slowly up and down the long avenue. He recognized the fair, sad face of the young queen, and he thought of the English ladies he had left behind him. Was that young lady, who had the sketch-book, still busy with her pencil, over the agony of a dying bull, perhaps, or the last struggle of its victim? he wondered. All the English blood in him boiled as he thought of the horses. For a long time afterwards he could not look at the sorriest London cab-hack without a sickening recollection of the butchery he had witnessed. There was some manliness—some fair-play in a chase after fox or stag. There, at least, the hunted creature had a chance of life; but the ring—what better was it than a gigantic slaughter-house? His mind was angrily full of the subject; he could not wrench his thoughts

from it. For this youth took everything hotly, finding many windmills to challenge in the course of his journey through life—a knight, be it said for him, who was always on the side of the injured. What did Ralph mean—Ralph, who had the public ear—what did he mean by sitting supinely, and letting this great abomination go undenounced?

While he was entertaining his anger and mentally addressing his cousin in the language of reproach, two people, busy with emotions not less strong, were walking on the side-path behind his seat. There were many others who walked there; but these two were English, and they spoke in their own tongue, without fear of being understood.

Philippa had quickly forsaken her pretence of illness. When Di left her she rose and dressed, and slipped out of the house unnoticed. There was a little coldness between mother and child; and Mrs. Henshaw had refrained from going to her daughter's room, keeping solitary possession of the drawing-room, her heart full of bitter thoughts and memories hardly less bitter.

Philippa was meanwhile walking in the Recoletos with the man of whom she had spoken to Di in such scornful terms. She was closely veiled, and wore the simplest of her simple

dresses; but there was no mistaking her tall, straight figure, or the proud carriage of her head. The interview—Felix guessed afterwards—must have been a stormy one; but he never knew what had passed between them. The first thing that aroused his attention was the sound of an English voice—a voice high-pitched and clear, which seemed to come somewhere from behind him.

"I ought to know that voice," he thought. "Where have I heard it before?" Then he listened idly, and he heard these strange words—

"If you succeed in cajoling him as you cajoled me, I'll have the pleasure of showing him those letters you are so anxious to get back. Now you know why I refuse to part with them."

"Where have I heard that delightful person before?" Felix asked himself carelessly. "His accent and his sentiments seem quite familiar to me."

He glanced round him, but he saw only a group of Spanish ladies, attended by their cavaliers. There was a rustle of trailing skirts, a faint breath of perfume, dark eyes looked at him languidly. There was no one to whom the wandering voice could possibly belong. Then

the passing horses caught his eye, and his mind went back to the spectacle he had left, where the trembling animals awaited the fate they were powerless to resist. He remembered the sea of faces, lit with an almost fiendish excitement at the sight of the blood that soaked the sands of the arena. There was something tigerish, surely, in the nature that could take pleasure in such a spectacle. He had quite forgotten the words he had heard, when his attention was again arrested.

Philippa and her companion had walked on a few steps, but they had now turned, and were once more within earshot of the bench where he sat.

"You choose to be insulting because I am in your power," she said, with a ring of passion in her voice. "Have you not humiliated me enough already?"

"Will you tell me that you don't intend to marry him, if you can?"

She maintained a proud silence; and he continued, with the brutal frankness which is the anger of such a nature—

"You need not try to deny it. You will treat him as you have treated me. You will take what he has to offer; and if any one who is richer turns up, any one who is a still greater

fool, and will make a better dupe, you will fling him off, too, as you——"

At this juncture a young man jumped up, and confronted them—a young man whose blue eyes were blazing with a wrathful light.

"Miss Henshaw," he said gravely and low, putting a great constraint on himself, "I only this moment recognized your voice, and I thought"—he eyed her companion dangerously—"I thought you might like to know I was at hand."

"No doubt, by appointment," said Mr. Ferryman, with a sneer. "We were talking of you just now."

"You do me too much honour," said Felix, with much outward show of politeness, but with wrath in his heart.

He burned to knock the fellow down on the spot, and it was to his credit that he only turned to Philippa, and said quietly—

"May I walk home with you?"

Philippa was white to the very lips. She could not have spoken; but before she could even bow her head in assent, her companion struck in—

"She will go with you fast enough. She has been condescending to explain her reasons for throwing me over; but I dare say you know

them already. As for the letters, Miss Henshaw, no doubt this gentleman would like to look at them; they will prepare him for what he may expect in his turn."

He had been addressing Philippa, but now he looked at Felix. The two men regarded each other with ill-concealed hate. Love of Philippa had little enough to do with this feeling on either side. It may be questioned whether Mr. Ferryman knew the meaning of that high word. He admired Philippa as he admired his blue china and his marquetry; he had imagined he could buy her much in the same way that he had bought these other adornments; and he only longed the more to conquer her because she had thwarted and withstood him. His dislike to Felix came to him as an instinct, and may be summed up in a word or two. Felix was young, good-looking, and, sharpest sting of all, he was a gentleman, and a gentleman who, whether willingly or not, stood in his light. As for Felix, all his manhood rose in revolt against one who could treat a woman—any woman, were she the poorest and meanest of her sex—as this man had treated Philippa. He was not thinking of her now as his friend—as the girl whom he had almost persuaded himself that he loved. Could

it be that the process of disenchantment had already begun?

"We can spare you any further remarks," he said curtly; adding, with a meaning look, "I'll have a word with you again."

Then he drew Philippa's arm within his own, and led her away.

"Please get me a glass of water," she said when they had gone a few steps.

He took her to a seat, and darted to a stall not far off, coming back with a tumbler in his hand.

He stood in silence while she drank the contents. When he had restored the glass, he came back to her, and said—

"Do you feel able to go home now?"

"Home? Oh yes," she said, starting up: "mamma will miss me."

They went on again. Felix longed to utter some commonplace remark, but he remained dumb. His brain seemed to be asleep, his mind a blank. He tried to remember where he had been, what he had seen; then all at once the recollection of the bull-fight flashed across him again, and he plunged into the subject. He remembered afterwards that he must have given her a somewhat startling account of the spectacle; but his hot denunciaton fell on her

ears unheeded. In the middle of one of his angriest sentences she looked up at him; there was pain and shame in the beautiful eyes, which seemed hardly able to meet his.

"How much did you hear?" she asked abruptly.

"Nothing—from you—that you could wish unheard," he answered quickly. "You met his impertinences with the silence they deserved. As for——"

"As for Mr. Ferryman, he had a right to complain. I have treated him badly." She paused.

"Don't defend him," he said with haste; "nothing can excuse him."

"But if I have done wrong, I have been punished for it." She averted her head, but he could see that her lips were quivering.

He felt an immense compassion for her, that he longed to put in words; but, as if she divined his intention, she drew herself up again, and said, with a laugh—

"You did not know I should submit so tamely to be scolded and raged at, did you, and —and misrepresented?"

She had thrown back her veil. A burning blush succeeded her paleness, but she looked at him steadily.

"I did not give his words a passing thought," Felix made answer with all the carelessness he could assume—which was not much. "Or if I did," he added more truthfully, "it was only to resent them on your behalf."

He felt that he was escaping but awkwardly from the difficulty. He was inwardly chafing against the restraints of speech between man and woman. Why was it not possible—why would it be an impertinence on his part to assure her frankly: "I acquit you of all designs upon me; of the schemes to entrap me into matrimony, of which this delightful person accuses you"? Why was it equally impossible for him to say now, what would have been easily said twenty-four hours before—"Marry me, and give me the right to defend you from the faintest shadow of reproach"?

He felt no impulse to make this appeal; he only felt that he would give anything to restore to her her self-respect, and to make her forget that he had been an unwilling listener to this disclosure.

"I will tell you why I bore it as I did," Philippa went on proudly. "Mr. Ferryman seemed to think you would be interested in our correspondence."

He made a quick gesture of dissent, but she paid no heed to his protest.

"There were letters—love-letters, I suppose you might call them—that passed between us some years ago. I promised to marry him then, but now—I have changed my mind. All this can't be very interesting to you, and I don't say it to excuse myself. But——"

"You had the best of reasons for what you have done, I am sure," he made haste to say. It was a new position to him, this of confessor, and he was aware that he played his part but crudely. He was not, in truth, very comfortable. Somewhere in the background of his thoughts there was a faint sense of distrust and disapproval; but, to do him justice, he did not encourage it or dwell on it; he only remembered that he had vowed to stand to her in the place of brother.

"I wish I could help you," he said impetuously.

She shook her head.

"You can't do that. Never mind me," she said, with her old smile. "I have been scolded, but I told you I deserved it—partly, at least. I am only sorry that any friend of mine should have suffered with me. If you can forget the rudeness to yourself——"

"As far as I am concerned, it is all forgotten," he said with assumed lightness, as he parted

with her at the door. He said nothing of that further explanation which he intended to have with Mr. Ferryman. He went home more grave than when he had set out. The bull-fight was forgotten. Here, surely, was an enterprise more worthy of his steel, a wrong to redress more clamant than any that had so occupied his thoughts an hour or two before.

END OF VOL. I.

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ALASNAM'S LADY.

A MODERN ROMANCE.

BY

LESLIE KEITH,

AUTHOR OF "SURRENDER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ALASNAM'S LADY.



CHAPTER I.

"Is this your comfort?
The cordial that ye bring a wretched lady?"

THE luncheon party was not a success. There was a gloom over everybody which all Mr. Ouvry's blandness could not dissipate. The tempting little dishes and the excellent wine failed of their usual effect; they did nothing to thaw the general frostiness which seemed to hold the party in a spell.

Philippa, it need hardly be said, was not present. Mrs. Henshaw came, but she did not prove the support that had been promised; she looked, on the contrary, as if she herself needed bracing. She still wore the limp gown, and her face expressed all too plainly that the day for disguises was gone. It was no longer pos-

sible, even if she had desired it, to hide her despair.

Mr. Ouvry looked at her once or twice, and wondered how so fine a woman could so abandon all her graces and charms. "She ought to have managed better," he said to himself softly. "This sort of betrayal does no good; it only makes a man more conscious that he must be master. A charming young lady like Miss Philippa ought to have known better than to make things uncomfortable all round. My Deonys, now, would never have given me pain."

He tried to catch a glimpse of his daughter as the thought of her arose in his mind. There was a large, full-leaved myrtle in a fancy pot between them, and he could not see her face. If he could have looked at her he would have seen that she was very grave, with a little flushed colour that came and went in her cheeks, and an almost proud curve of the lips that were usually so tender. She felt that there was something treacherous to her friend in this pretence of festivity, and, besides, in the bedroom—while she had put those little finishing touches to her costume, which even its plainness and her melancholy permitted—Mrs. Henshaw had made some remarks that rankled.

A vague, mysterious, general plaint—ad-

dressed as much to the looking-glass as to you—is hardly to be answered, especially when the speaker is your guest; but Deonys felt that this emphatic lingering on one theme, this perpetual hint that there was a duty she was bound to perform, meant something more than appeared. What duty did she owe to Philippa beyond that quick impulse to help and shield her, which love had already prompted? And how could she—so young and not wise, as her father had told her—be her deliverer? Then there was this other hint about money and about rights that were denied. What had she to do with this? She could have smiled at it all, except that it vexed her and haunted her memory persistently.

Mr. Ouvry, of course, knew nothing of these causes for her silence—which did not displease him. She had taken pains to set the table out daintily, and had been careful to select the little dishes that he preferred, and that was all you could expect of a little girl who was only eighteen, and who had not seen the world. One did not want her to be bold, and her timidity sat very well on her. He glanced about him well content. It was the room and the table of a gentleman who was not rich, not vulgarly rich, but who loved refinement, and knew what was in good taste.

He turned to his guest, who was eating with that impassive deliberateness with which he seemed to do everything.

"And you have seen all the sights, I suppose?" he said, picking up the talk where it had been left off. "You travellers to whom everything is new, are to be envied."

"I did not come here to see sights," said Mr. Ferryman, glancing up with a shadowed brow from his plate.

"Ah! there is not much to see that would interest you, I dare say," said Mr. Ouvry carelessly. "No mills, nothing of that kind. There's the tobacco factory; it is very flourishing, I believe, and employs a great many 'hands'—that is what you call them, isn't it? I could get you an order for that, if you care about it."

"Thanks, but I don't care about it—at least, not till I've done the business I came here to do. I'll think of looking round me after that. Business first, pleasure after, that's always been my motto."

Mrs. Henshaw hurriedly poured some water into her glass and held it to her lips.

"Ah, you should play a little," said Mr. Ouvry blandly, ignoring the nature of the business that brought this commercial person to Madrid. "A little relaxation is good for

everybody. But I dare say work grows very absorbing. I'm an idler myself, but I have noticed it in others."

"If you want to be rich you must work," said Mr. Ferryman, with frankly expressed contempt for this dilettante gentleman.

"Rich, yes; we have fallen out of the race here. I am afraid we are too indolent."

"Not much money going? I should say not, so far as I have seen. A poor, beggarly lot, the Spaniards."

"Not so poor—not so very poor as you might think," said Mr. Ouvry mildly. "We understand comfort here, though we don't perhaps make any great display—don't we, now?" He addressed himself to Mrs. Henshaw, turning to her and smiling and speaking gracefully.

"Comfort? Oh yes, we were very comfortable a little while ago," she said absently.

"Well, I like something to show for my money. Money means power. What's the good of it if you lock it up and never use it? You should see how we manage in Manchester and Liverpool; that would surprise you."

"There has been a great increase of luxury, I understand. It's a long time since I was in England, a very long time, and there have been many changes, no doubt."

"Luxury? Well, yes, rather. Not that I

go in for scattering right and left; but I don't mind parting freely when I've set my heart on anything. You can get anything, if you give a long enough price for it."

"Di, help Mrs. Henshaw to the wine that is next you, my child. You must taste our Jerez"—he turned to his guest—"though you will hardly recognize it under its English name."

"I don't care for your wines here; too light for me. I have a goodish cellar at home, though I say it. You have your money's worth in wine; no loss there. There's some claret"—he went on to describe its virtues—"and some thirty-four port. I got it in an odd way, now; but if you've money, as I said before, you can buy anything."

"Ah, you have great advantages, you happy owners of a Fortunatus' purse," said Mr. Ouvry gaily. "We have to be content with little things—little things. Yet we have our trifling comforts, too. Here is Mrs. Henshaw who will speak a good word for us, though she knows your English ways."

In spite of all his gaiety he was growing inwardly irritated and angry. He was tired of all this boasting about the money which he despised; and he thought Mrs. Henshaw selfish, very selfish. Was he not doing his utmost to

support her cause—enduring this person who was offensive to him, for her sake—and yet she made no attempt to second his efforts. She sat as if dumb despair had overwhelmed her. She, too, had talked to him about money—this subject that seemed to be uppermost in every one's thoughts. It was in the air like an epidemic; even Di had hinted at it. It had been a painful interview, and he had been obliged to say things that he exceedingly disliked to say—to touch on subjects he would rather not have referred to. It was sad to him to refuse anything an old friend asked of him, but he was poor. What could he do? He spread out his white hands and shook his head at the mere thought. He had always openly proclaimed that he was poor. Then, by way of amendment, he had proposed this little lunch, to show that he bore her no ill will, that she had his countenance and sympathy, his help so far as he could give it. He had put himself out of the way to be kind to a man with whom he had nothing in common; he had done his best to help her cause, and she would do nothing to make things pleasant. It was very selfish.

"Papa," said Di, in one of the pauses that now occurred with greater frequency, "if you don't mind—Mrs. Henshaw is tired——"

"Yes, yes; leave us, my child. Take Mrs. Henshaw to your own little room, and persuade her to rest on the sofa. You will join us afterwards?" he said pleasantly to the poor lady, who showed the greatest eagerness to accept this offer. "And Di will give us some coffee by-and-by."

They had risen, and he was holding open the door for them, when they all paused, arrested by a sudden sound. The man lingering at the table had risen, and was holding his glass. He put it down with a quick deepening of colour, and an expression that need not be recorded.

Di looked round startled.

It was the sound of some one playing in the room beneath them. The notes of a rather joyous air came up to them quite distinctly, played, one would say, with a hint of defiance—of disdain. All these things seemed to be in the music, and something more; a mischievous, smiling indifference that expressed itself, one could hardly tell how—perhaps in the touch, light and skilled and carelessly precise.

Di had never seen Philippa at the piano, but she knew that it was Philippa who was the musician. She did not need to be enlightened by Mr. Ferryman, who said, with his usual cold distinctness of utterance, but with something

rather more than his usual scowl, as he drew his whiskers together in one hand—

"Miss Henshaw has recovered, apparently."

"Ah, what a pity we couldn't persuade her to join us," said Mr. Ouvry, holding the door open for the ladies to pass out.

In the little odd-shaped room behind the tapestry hanging, Mrs. Henshaw turned upon the young girl.

"You see what she does!" she cried. "Listen! do you hear her? She will madden him with her folly. All the week she has remained in her own room, and refused to see any one—even me—even her own mother; and now, the moment our backs are turned, see how she behaves!"

The sprightly music reached them more faintly in the little shut-off room. Di listened, perplexed, and yet she felt an unaccountable inclination to laugh. Philippa could never have reached this pitch of audacious gaiety unless she had discovered some wonderful path out of this labyrinth of trouble. If only the last few weeks could be wiped out, put away; if only this man would go, they might fall back into the old ways and be happy again. Hope sprang up; nothing but Mrs. Henshaw's tragic face kept her from smiling. She could not know that the old days would never return perfect as

they went, because though love might linger, undoubting trust was gone.

She turned a bright face to the poor lady.

"Something must have happened," she said; "it is Philippa's way of telling us that she has good news for us."

"Good news!" cried Mrs. Henshaw eagerly, laying her hand on the girl's wrist. "Do you think she has given in—did you persuade her, after all? Why didn't you tell me before?" she demanded.

"Tell you?" said Di, moving back a step. "Oh, you would never call it good news that she should marry that man?" she cried, light dawning on her.

"It is the only way," said Mrs. Henshaw gloomily. "I told you so before. You are very dull, I think."

"I am not clever," said Di gravely and simply—"not clever like Philippa—but one doesn't need to know very much to see that he couldn't make her happy. You heard how he talked—all about his money. He would [illegible] Philippa like his wine, or his horses, or his house that he told us about. And he would know that she took him just for these things that he could give her, and not for himself at all. There would be no sacredness in a marriage like that."

Mrs. Henshaw stood, a tragic, half-scornful image of despair, in her straight gown and severe head-dress, while the young girl poured out her simple, old-world ideas of the love and trust that alone to her made oneness possible. She was sorry for the unhappy mother, and she felt that she had not spoken gently before. It seemed as if she only needed to speak gently to make it all plain and convincing.

Mrs. Henshaw heard her to the end; her dull, anxious eyes fixed on the earnest ones that seemed to plead for Philippa. Perhaps it was old thronging memories of days when she, too, had thought love was all that now lent her patience. In after days, she used to tell how Di had lectured her and say, with a shake of the head, she feared the girl was very forward. No doubt she took it from her mother, who had been bold enough, as every one knew. But at this time, in the little room which the distant strains of melody invaded, she could think of nothing outside her own needs.

Yet Di's very guilelessness made her answer a trifle less incisive than it might have been.

"You know nothing about it," she said coldly. "All that is very well, it is what one says when one is young. I want her to be happy, I am sure. She is all that I have. If it is his being in trade you object to, that only

shows how ignorant you are—when dukes and earls are not ashamed to be merchants. And as for literary men—I have heard of authors and people like that who kept market gardens and made carpets, and I'm sure brewers are received everywhere. If you have been prejudicing Philippa——"

"Oh, no," said Di, opening her eyes; "why should I do that? He might be a butcher or a baker, and be a very good man, but he isn't good."

"A baker! As if my child could marry a man who wore a white apron and sold loaves! It is such bad taste to talk like that. Not good? What can you know? He has excellent points, and I don't see why she shouldn't be happy; as much so as others are."

"Never, with that man!" Di said impulsively; thinking only of Philippa. "She could never get to like him. It isn't that he is in business, or that he is plain-looking—that wouldn't matter, but his mind is ugly too."

"You are most unjust, and really quite indelicate!" cried Mrs. Henshaw, taking refuge once more in her sense of outraged ladyhood. "When I was a girl I never presumed to have an opinion on such subjects. An ugly mind! No wonder Philippa is prejudiced and obstinate if that is how you talk to her. I might have

known that my poor child would suffer from your friendship."

"Oh, don't let Philippa marry him!" Di went forward and laid her little hand on that other hand from which all the bright rings had been stripped. "She must not do it. If he had any honour, if he were nice, he would go away when he sees that he is hateful to her; because he must see it."

"Go away! child, how dull you are. She has promised to marry him, she can't get free. Do you think he is a man who is likely to give up his claim for a mere whim on her part?"

"I know," Di said gravely, "he bought her promise. But if he were paid back——"

"Was that what you meant by good news?" Mrs. Henshaw caught at this suggestion. "Was that what you thought when you said that Philippa was trying to tell us something pleasant—that she has found a way to pay back the money?"

Di shrank from the hungry anxiety of the poor lady's eyes; all the frail defences of her pride were swept away as she reached out to grasp at this possible deliverance. "I want her to be happy," she cried. "Do you think I like him so much after the way he has treated me this week. Oh, what I have suffered! And

now you think she has discovered a way to pay him?"

"How can I know?—oh, I am sorry to disappoint you," she answered sadly. "I thought it might be that, but how can I be sure?"

The music died out, and with it her hope seemed suddenly quenched too.

"You are a false comforter," said Mrs. Henshaw bitterly, pushing away the entreating hand. "You talk and you do nothing, you and your father. It is he, your father, who ought to have helped us; it is only just that he should do it, but he refuses, and now my poor Philippa must be sacrificed!"

All at once, in face of this new disappointment, the sacrifice of Philippa took large proportions; there was no longer any talk of her being happy as others were. She was now to be miserable, and all because justice had been denied her.

Di summoned patience to her aid, and made one more effort to save her friend.

"Even if he isn't paid just now he must go away," she said resolutely. "She ought never to have promised, but it is better to break her word than to be false all her life. There would be less truth in keeping such a promise than in breaking it."

Mrs. Henshaw sank down on a low seat, and covered her eyes. She gave herself up to dark

reflections. There was in all this wearisome talk of truth and falsehood nothing that was of the least practical use; you might as well expect to convert Mr. Ferryman to your views by reading aloud a moral "middle" from the *Saturday Review*.

"Think if there should be some one who was good and true, and whom Philippa liked," said Di timidly, after a pause, "and it was too late."

Mrs. Henshaw removed her handkerchief, and looked up dully. She heard nothing but one word; but in it there was a vague possibility of comfort.

"Some one else?" she repeated.

"I don't know," Di said hurriedly. "One does not talk of these things, but it might very easily be. Philippa is so beautiful, and think if you made her marry this man, and all the time there was somebody else!"

"Do you think every woman marries the man she loves!" cried the older lady with disdain. "Do you think *any* woman does?"

"Yes, I do." Di's colour came and went, but her eyes were brave and direct in their glance. "And Philippa must be one of them."

Mrs. Henshaw sat up and stared at her. Her handkerchief dropped from her hands. Slowly in her dull, anxious eyes, there grew a little spark of something that might be resolution, or

desire, or hope. Deonys watched the dawning of her thought with fascination, but when it clothed itself in words, she hated it.

"You mean Felix Chester," said the lady slowly.

"I named no one!" cried the girl unwillingly. "He never told me, and Philippa never spoke. I only said there might be some one else," said poor Di, blushing and ashamed, and filled with a sudden hatred of the whole subject.

Mrs. Henshaw was not listening.

"He would lend it; he is rich," she murmured to herself. "It is nothing to him."

She had risen and was pacing the room. Her limp draperies seemed to recover some of the old sweep and rustle as she walked. She put up her hands, and pushed back the cap from her brow, instinctively her back straightened, and her head was raised, as this little germ of thought expanded and began to take definite shape—to put out small leaves and blossoms of hope.

"He is quite as rich," she continued in an undertone, "and in a much better position. I was a fool not to think of this way before; my sufferings have made me dull. It is easy to see he loves my girl; I was so sure of it before, but I have forgotten everything. My poor Philippa! He would do much to win her."

Deonys turned away from these fragments of her mental workings, and went out on the balcony.

She leaned over it and looked broodingly on the crowd beneath. The familiar sounds came up, but they did not consciously reach her. The great square was full of life and bustle at this its busiest hour; clerks and milliners, and the tide of shop boys and girls were leisurely returning from dinner, a little knot of men transacted business, relieved by much gesticulation, on the pavement of the Montera; veiled ladies flitted back from mass; above all the noise of wheels and the hum of voices came the harsh screech of a parrot crawling over its gilded cage in a neighbouring balcony.

She was thinking with hot shame of her sudden impulse. What had she done? Felix Chester's bright face rose before her—was it love that made it so sunny, she wondered wistfully, and was it he whom Philippa would choose before all others? Or had she made a dreadful blunder, and only brought more trouble on everybody? For a moment she wished these people had never come to disturb the harmony of her life with their mysteries—then she remembered her vow of friendship, and her heart melted. There was a momentary hush of the crowd below, and it appealed to her as the

ordinary sounds had not done. She leaned forward a little and looked downward. A priest was passing with the Host, and the people knelt as the tinkle of the bell was heard. Some one was in a last extremity—was dying. It was no new sight to Deonys, but she thought of it with a little pang. Love troubles all at once looked paltry and insignificant. "I suppose it won't matter so very much when it come to that," she said to herself, and turned to rejoin her guest.

Mrs. Henshaw had not missed her. She was standing before a narrow mirror in a dim frame hung high on the wall. She had taken off her cap and tossed it aside; the bands of her hair already took a less severe curve. There were other signs of renewed hope about her.

"Ah, my dear," she said, with a smile, "if my beloved girl is happy and honoured, it will be you who have done it. It was only right if you knew everything; but you did not know, and I am not ungrateful. It will be hard to do, but I have done hard things before. We must think a little of you, too, eh? and of some one we won't name."

Di's cheeks flamed; but what she might have replied remains uncertain, for the door opened, and Mr. Ouvry appeared. Behind him came Mr. Ferryman, looking about him as if he were

pricing the furniture and repeating that remark about Spanish insolvency and the power of money to buy anything you desire to possess. His glance included them all. There was an easy air of mastery about him, especially when his eyes rested on Mrs. Henshaw. He drew together his whiskers, and surveyed her calmly. He noticed the little change in her manner, the fluttering attempt at rebellion; but it did not disturb him. He meant to have his own way, even if he had to pay heavily for it.

"Mr. Ferryman has been examining our little collection, Di," said Mr. Ouvry, standing with his back to the fireplace, and smiling graciously on his guests. "I'm afraid he doesn't set such a high value on our treasures as we do."

"I don't know about that," said the person referred to; "you can pick them up cheap, I suppose. I don't go in for collecting myself. I put my house into the hands of Green and Barnes, the art decorators; that's the thing to do, you know, if you want everything correct."

"Ah, no doubt."

"I gave them a general order," he continued, lifting a book from the table, and handling it as if it were a ledger. "I said to them, 'None of your tertiary colours for me; I won't have your spinach and pea-soup on my walls. You go to the Zoo and look at a parrot—there's

good harmony for you, and a bit of colour. I'll have something to show for my money.' I rather think I hit it there. It has been the making of Green and Barnes. They send people to look at the house, you know."

"Ah, no doubt," Mr. Ouvry repeated. "Very charming for you, and a great saving of trouble, that way of doing things; but a little loss of individuality, eh?"

"Oh, I don't care about that; saves a lot of bother, as you say. Comes dearer, perhaps; but we don't mind about that over there. Come and take a look at it next time you are north."

"Thank you," said Mr. Ouvry, with apparent gratitude, "thank you very much; but I never go north. I am no traveller. I shrink from revisiting my country. Sad memories," he sighed: then he smiled, as if unwilling to obtrude his griefs on others. "I hear of it from my friends," he said, turning to Mrs. Henshaw; "I count on them for news."

"I must go down to my poor Philippa," she answered, rising hurriedly, perhaps afraid of a too pointed invitation to inspect the work of Messrs. Green and Barnes. "My poor child has been alone all day."

"Won't you stay and have some coffee? Our Concha is famed for her coffee."

"No, I must go."

"One may hope to see Miss Henshaw this evening, since she has recovered?"

The words hardly veiled the intended sneer. There was room enough, but Mr. Ferryman seemed to block the path to the door, and make it impossible for her to ignore his question. There was, to her secret thought, an imperious command in his voice.

"Yes, my daughter will see you." She shrank at first; but she quickly summoned courage, and recovered a remnant of her old dignity. "I think we must have one of our pleasant little gatherings." She turned to the girl behind her. "Di, my dear, couldn't you join us this evening?"

"No," said Deonys with decision; "I couldn't do that."

She went, without further attempt at persuasion, and Mr. Ferryman soon after took his leave.

"Deonys, my child," said her father, coming back from escorting his guest to the door, "don't deny yourself any little pleasure for me. Is it dinner you were thinking of? I have dined. A cup of tea by-and-by. Concha will attend to me."

"Oh, padre!" cried Di reproachfully, "do you think I want any more of *that* man! If you really don't care to dine, we can have a

nice, cosy little supper together to take the bad taste away. Don't you feel as if you had been lunching on bank-notes?"

"Ah, our friend is a little too pronounced, eh? Like his house. You don't think Miss Philippa will be tempted by all these fine things?"

"I like something to show for my money," said Di with saucy mimicry; "but there are some things even he can't buy, padre. Were things as you liked them?" she asked, after a pause. "Did I do right?"

"Yes, yes, you did very well. Everything was as I wished."

"Then it is over," she answered, with a great sigh of satisfaction; "and we needn't have him again."

"Well, we have done the right thing—been hospitable and taken an interest. Mrs. Henshaw is an old friend, and I wished to please her; but you ladies are capricious. One might almost imagine she had changed her mind." He spoke with mild patience. "Ah, you ladies, there is no understanding you."

Di did not accept the gauntlet thrown at her feet. She was wondering if she had done "the right thing." She could not tell, and she tried to put the thought away from her. She was tired of this frequent appeal to her strongest

emotions, and the luncheon party was over, and her father had been pleased!

She did not know of the little note that was at that moment speeding across the square, and that was presently to fall into Felix Chester's hands.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Rumour! that ugly jade!"

Felix Chester had not been idle during his enforced absence from the gilded salon in the Preciados. He had been thinking. "How old Ralph would scoff at the word!" he said to himself, with a grin. He had been recalling ended school days and college days less remote. Old friends were passed in review before him—kindred spirits, to whom he had sworn a loyal devotion—acquaintances who had been more quickly forgotten. He had been popular with all sorts of men, even the reading men, who "went in" for continual and systematic work, while he (Felix), had modestly contented himself with a study of the various ways in which time might be wasted. It was with one of these, his old comrades, that his thinking had specially to do at this time. He put away from him, with a sigh, many a brilliant and fascinating

memory, and he tasked himself with recalling all he could about a certain Alfred Smith.

His thoughts had not lingered much about Smith since they parted; but surely he had heard something about him lately. He had cultivated system, read hard, starved himself a little, drank nothing but mild, effervescing stuffs, and was never seen on the river. In fact, he was in all respects the opposite of Felix, who had a robust enjoyment in the good things of life. These particulars came back readily enough, and presently other facts were recalled. After taking his degree, he had entered holy orders, and was presented to a small living in the north—in Lancashire, wasn't it—in Manchester or in Liverpool? A sudden happy thought visited him. He sprang up, seized his desk, and turned out the contents. Yes, here was Cuthbertson's letter, not destroyed, as he had feared; and here was everything about Smith—his difficulties with his bishop, his ritualistic tendencies, and so on. Felix tossed back all the papers, and, searching for a clean sheet, sat down to write. He expressed a great desire to take up the dropped thread of his acquaintance with Smith. He had always liked the old fellow, though he had laughed at him a little. He asked him a great many questions; he scribbled off a handsome cheque, with the

modest hope that he might find it useful in the decoration or the restoration of his church. He was sure to go in for that sort of thing, old Smith. What would the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings think of their new disciple?—Felix wondered, with inward amusement. He had listened to many subtle and profound arguments at their meetings in London, and here he was going dead against the doctrine of the "anti-scrapers" on the first opportunity! Well, it was all for a good cause; it was a case in which one might be pardoned the doing of a little evil for the sake of securing a great good.

When he had signed his name, and sealed and addressed his letter, he lay back in his chair, and gave himself up to laughter. There was something very amusing indeed about this correspondence with an old friend. Mr. Ferryman, who occupied the adjoining room, scowled as that gay burst of merriment reached him. The two men had not again met since that day on the Recoletos, but their mutual dislike had grown in the interval. Felix had not found his way again to the Preciados. When he would have gone, something held him back, and that note which Mrs. Henshaw had written had not yet reached him.

The lady herself was far from happy, in spite

of the momentary gleam of cheerfulness that had visited her in the tapestried room. She was weak, but she was not wholly bad, and the struggle between her better and her baser nature rent her sorely. Never till a week or two ago had she known the bitterness of humiliation;—she who had been always so ostentatious, so confident, so unvaryingly right. To escape from this hard bondage at any cost had been her one endeavour. She could no longer endure it. She must be set free, even if her deliverance were purchased at the price of Philippa's happiness. Then there had come that hint of a rescuer, who should relieve her of this burdening sense of shame, and make Philippa happy at the same time. She had grasped at it eagerly at the moment; but now that she looked at it a little closely, it seemed that even here there was room for much despondency. Felix had showed some eagerness to come to Madrid with them; he had been charming and attentive and pleasant; but, then, he had been all these things for the last year or two; he was all these things to the very newest of his acquaintances; and he showed no signs of taking the needful step over the boundary that divides friendliness from love.

"You do nothing to help me," she said to

her daughter, irritated and despairing. "You do everything to hinder me."

It was evening; the lights were low, the drawing-room dull, and both ladies, it must be told, a little tired of each other.

"I have let things take their course," Philippa answered. She was lying back in a large chair; she was pale, and this lounging attitude was new to her. "What else was there to do?" she went on presently. "It seems to me we are drifting on very surely to the end you desire. Oh, I am so tired of it all!"

There was something hopeless in the tone, that touched the latent mother-love in Mrs. Henshaw's heart.

"I want you to be happy," she said wistfully. "Why should I desire to see my only child miserable? If you would only help me——"

"But I can't be happy to order, unfortunately," Philippa smiled. "Don't speak of happiness and that man in the same breath; there's a whole world between them."

"I did not marry for love," said Mrs. Henshaw, pursuing her own train of thought; "and yet I believe I did my duty as a wife."

"Ah, if he had been like my father! but it is desecration to compare them."

"Perhaps that child was not so far wrong,

after all," said Mrs. Henshaw musingly; and then she sighed. "The world would call it utter folly, but if I had had my own way—if he hadn't been entrapped by that scheming creature I might have been much happier and better, and poor papa might have married some clever, sensible, elderly person, though you wouldn't have had my beauty. I shouldn't have lost all my good looks and turned grey with worrying myself to death about you, for he is rich and your poor papa was ruined. I'm sure I don't know what he does with all his money, unless he is hoarding it for that girl."

Philippa stared; this inconsequent speech, with its odd mixture of feeling and folly, was more surprising to her than most of her mother's speeches; it hinted at a past of which she knew and wished to know nothing.

"If you had married some one else," she said with a gleam of fun in her eyes, "you wouldn't have had much to do with me, I suppose; and if I had taken after my plain, elderly mamma, Mr. Ferryman wouldn't—— "

"Do be quiet, Philippa, you confuse me with your arguments. You should never argue, it is unladylike. And what is the use of supposing so many things when you can't change anything."

"Oh," said Philippa with a little sigh, "it's

such a comfort to get away from the hard truth sometimes. I wish I could suppose myself into the ugliest girl I ever saw—that Miss Reed, for instance, with the red hair. Do you remember her?"

"What nonsense you talk! I have no patience with you. You ought to be thankful you are not like that unfortunate girl, who was really the plainest—and so conceited, too. You always notice that plain people are vain. You know very well that, without a fortune, your appearance is your only recommendation."

"I know," said Philippa gravely. "Oh, mamma, why were you so pretty? or why wasn't I like poor, plain papa?"

She went over to her mother and with a rare gesture of tenderness bent and stroked her cheek. "But I must say you have done the best you could to eclipse your charms the last few days. Did Blake invent this hideous cap?"

"How could I think of my dress," said Mrs. Henshaw reproachfully, "when I was so miserable?"

"It was paying him far too great a compliment," said the girl proudly.

"Well, I'll put on my black satin to-morrow, and the cap you made for me, child. I am not quite faded yet, and I needn't make myself a fright; but I never could bear the trivolity some

people show in their dress, never making any difference however they may feel; it shows such a light mind. I wore crape for years for your poor papa, though I was so young. Perhaps it is well, though, to let him see that we are not quite so helpless as he supposes."

"Mamma," said Philippa, to whom these sentiments conveyed some subtle meaning not openly expressed, "have you thought of any new plan?" She clasped the back of the chair, and leaning over it spoke in a low voice.

Mrs. Henshaw made no immediate answer, and Philippa went on more vehemently—

"Because I can't take the one *he* wants, and sell myself to him. Nothing will make me change my mind, even if I have to beg in the streets for bread."

"Ah! what do you know of poverty?"

"A little, I think. At least, it would be better than wealth with him."

"I have told you I want you to be happy!" she said plaintively.

"And I won't risk my chance of happiness by giving it into his hands," Philippa answered gravely. "If I must marry I might surely find a lighter yoke."

"I have thought of another way."

Mrs. Henshaw's voice was rather faint; she clasped her hands together to hide their nervous

trembling. She was thankful that her face could not be seen by the girl standing behind her.

"Then don't tell me what it is," said Philippa quickly. "I don't want to know. Don't tell me anything about it; not even a hint. Oh, I am so tired of it all!" she said with sudden vehemence. "I want to forget it."

"You don't think of me, or of what I have suffered."

"If it comes to suffering——" Philippa began gloomily, then she checked herself. "I do think of you, poor mamma; but my marriage would not have helped you, and any other way will be better—it cannot, at least, be worse."

"It will be very difficult. But I can bear it alone. I am not selfish, I hope. I can suffer for those I love."

She spoke with melancholy intonation, but she was secretly relieved that Philippa showed no curiosity to learn the particulars of this new plan. She was a little afraid of Philippa. Generally the girl acquiesced in the arrangements supposed to be made for her good, contenting herself with a half sarcastic comment or two; but now and then she startled her mother by an outleap of indignant scorn, or a bitter protest, the more unexpected because of her general light gaiety. Who could tell how

she would accept this—the last hope of freedom from a bondage that was growing unendurable? There was just enough of uncertainty about her manner of viewing the proposal to make it well she should remain ignorant. And there was besides, in the lady's mind a great shrinking from clothing her vague resolution in definite words. It would be so hard to draw back, and she felt she must leave herself a loophole of escape. For, after all, to ask Felix Chester for a large sum of money would be only a less bitter wound to her pride than to accept it from Mr. Ferryman on his own terms. She knew it now; it would not be the entire deliverance she had dreamed of; it would be but a shifting of her shame.

"I am doing it for you. I am doing a very hard thing for you, Philippa, that you may have the chances I have missed," she said, as she thought of all these difficulties that strewed her path.

"I know mamma." Philippa stooped and kissed her brow. "There, don't let us talk of it any more, I am so tired of it all. I am going to bed; I'm an invalid yet, you know." She turned at the door to look back with a smile. "Don't sit up and worry, that will do no good."

"That is easily said," Mrs. Henshaw answered,

with an unintentional touch of sarcasm; but she was not sorry to be left alone. Her hands dropped heavily, her face fell into grave, care-worn lines. "If he loves her, how easy it will all be," she said to herself, and yet her fears were greater than her hopes in the silent night watch that she kept.

Philippa shut herself in her room; she, too, had urgent thoughts that would not be settled. As she brushed her long hair, she said, half-aloud, as if addressing the presence in the mirror—

"If I get out of this scrape, I'll never think of marrying anybody at all; no, not anybody," she said, with a defiant frown at some image that started up in her mind. "I'll be an old maid, like Miss Barbara, or dear little Miss Piper, and hold myself up as a warning to all silly girls in the ages to come."

In the days that followed Deonys avoided her friend. She dreaded meeting Mr. Ferryman, and she shrank almost as much from seeing Felix Chester. She felt as if she had put out her hand to alter his destiny without knowing whether she was doing him a kindness or an injury. It was a foolish feeling, but it was hers. She did not wish to meet him, and to read in his face either the assurance or the absence of his devotion to Philippa.

She knew that both young men came much

to Mrs. Henshaw's apartments (for Felix had renewed his visits); once or twice she saw Mr. Ferryman crossing the square, with a scowl on his face that boded no good. Among her other fears she entertained one that the young men might quarrel, and that somehow the blame and the shame of their disagreement would rest on her. At this time, too, there was an ominous stirring in the political world—all the sympathy she could spare from her friends she gave to her hero—"il re galantuomo," the young king of an alien people.

November was nearly ended, and Ralph still lingered in the south. Di felt very lonely. One day she put on her hat and went to visit her comforter—her second mother, as she sometimes called Mrs. Gordon. Miss Barbara was not at home, and that was to be counted a piece of good fortune. Miss Barbara was excellent, worthy, the staunchest of friends, but not the companion to choose when the limitations of life and its sadness oppressed your spirit.

"Oh, I'm glad you are alone," she said, stooping to kiss the lips that welcomed her. This little fragile woman was her dearest friend. Deonys thought that the experiences of life had made her infinitely tender; she was the girl's conscience. It was impossible not to make confidences to her.

"Barbara has gone to see Miss Piper; it's her day, you know."

"I know," Di answered, and they both laughed. "Then she'll stay a good while?"

"I'm afraid of it."

"Oh, for Miss Piper? But you must think of me a little, too, and it is so good to get you all to myself again."

"Take off your hat, then, and let us be cosy. Do you want to draw the blinds?"

"No, I'll sit here and hide my face—so."

Mrs. Gordon laid a hand on the brown head. There was silence for a little while. The sun flooded the large room; it was all very still, except for the creak of the ox-carts labouring by outside, and the occasional passing of a carriage towards the Florida.

"And what is it, then, little one?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Di almost impatiently. "Things—everything."

"Nothing less than that?" Mrs. Gordon smiled.

Di was not listening. She sat up and looked at her friend. "Was mamma very pretty?" she said at last, as the result of all this pondering.

"Very pretty. Prettier than you are, Deonys."

"Yes, I know that."

Her clear eyes had not a shadow of chagrin in them.

"I wish I could remember her. I have a picture of her in my mind. She had yellow hair, and a black dress, and she looked sad."

"You can't remember her, Di."

"No; and of course it is all nonsense about her being sad, unless she was ill. She was ill a long time, wasn't she?"

"Yes; a long time."

"Poor little mamma; I always think of her as young, much younger than me, and wanting to be taken care of. I should have taken care of her. I wonder why she died, and went away from me so soon?"

She laid her head down again. By-and-by she said—

"I suppose the father and she were very happy?"

"Why do you ask that, Deonys?"

"I don't know." She glanced up and smiled. "It was an idle question, for of course I know they were. The poor padre can't bear to talk of her even yet—not even to me."

Mrs. Gordon's face wore a curious expression as she looked absently at the bit of serene sky framed in the window, but it melted into sudden tenderness as her glance wandered back, and fell on the girl's bent head.

"She shall never know from me," she said to herself. The words she would have spoken aloud were checked by a sudden summons at the door.

"Oh," cried Di with dismay, "there's a visitor, and I haven't even begun to tell you."

"It isn't Barbara—who can it be?"

It was Mrs. St. John, who came in with an air of cheerful importance, made her greetings, and restored, with one wave of her prettily gloved hand, the reign of the commonplace and the conventional.

"Here I am," she said, choosing a rocking-chair with her back to the light; "and, oh dear! how I do pity myself." She sighed and shook out all her flounces. "Mrs. Gordon, don't look so dreadfully hard-hearted. Think of my being torn from Paris, and whirled off here at a moment's notice. Now, really, isn't it rather brutal of Mr. St. John?"

"Very inconsiderate. I should have thought you had taught him better by this time."

"It's a beautiful thing, a well-managed husband!" sighed this aggrieved w[illegible] "Mine won't let me spend more than half the year in Paris. He says I should grow too frivolous. Now I like frivolity; I've a genius for it. Isn't it a pity to curb me in the only thing I'm good at?"

"You can find opportunities to practise your

accomplishment even here," said Mrs. Gordon, indulgent to this little woman, who, by her own frank confession, belonged to the trifling world.

"Your husband's position as *attaché* opens the door of all the gaieties for you. Your pretty costumes won't be quite thrown away."

"But they'll be wasted. I might as well wear a sack and put ashes on my head. There's nobody fit to appreciate Worth's genius here. Laura Delmar is spending the winter in New York. Isn't it mean of her?"

"Then you will be mistress of ceremonies at the American Embassy."

"Oh, well, Colonel Delmar can't get on without me; but it's mean of Laura all the same."

"And you will have the chance of being kind to some new friends. Did you hear of the addition to our colony?"

"Major Gibbs isn't married!" cried the lady, with animation.

"No." Mrs. Gordon smiled. "The ladies I speak of are friends of Di's."

"Oh, then, I guess they won't be my kind," said Mrs. St. John, with naïve disappointment. "But anyhow it's better than a Mrs. Gibbs. I don't care about having my gentlemen friends marry; and the major is a perfect slave to

me. Tell me about them," she said, turning to Di, who still sat on a low stool at Mrs. Gordon's sofa. "I'm dying to hear something new."

"There is nothing to tell, I think," she answered unwillingly. "They are English; papa knew them long ago; and Miss Henshaw is very pretty."

"Miss Henshaw! Oh, I know all about her. I didn't think she was a friend of yours." The little lady fell to laughing as she rocked herself back and forward.

"What do you know about her?" Di asked coldly.

"Mrs. Cross has been telling me about her. I guess we'll get on after all, unless she's too pretty. To think of her appointing to meet the Englishman at Miss Piper's! Now, I do call that real clever of her."

"What Englishman?" Di questioned again. She sat up, the colour in her cheeks was warm, and her eyes were very bright; but Mrs. St. John was too much engrossed with her story to notice these signs of emotion.

"Why, that man that wants to marry her, you know, the rival of the other one—the good looking one. Isn't it shocking taste to choose the ugly one, but I guess she wants a foil; and he's got more money, perhaps. Do tell me

about her. Is she really so pretty? Prettier than me, now?" she asked plaintively.

"It isn't true," said Di, passing by this appeal with scorn. "Who could say such things of her?"

"But Mrs. Cross saw her, or her maid did, or somebody," cried Mrs. St. John, unwilling to be deprived of her story in this unceremonious manner; "or she had it from Miss Piper's girl. Oh, I can't remember all the details, but I know it's true."

"She never did it," Di said again.

"Well, now, I wouldn't say there was anything to be shocked at; but you English are so stiff."

"She knows Miss Piper. She cannot have gone there."

Di rose and went to the most distant window, leaning her head against the pane. She was angry, disturbed and distressed. It was dreadful to her that people should talk of Philippa like that, for, of course, it was only talk. There was no truth in it.

In the hurry of her unwilling thoughts, she only heard snatches of the talk that fell from the visitor's lips, unchecked by her protest.

"They do say the young men will fight. Think of a duel—what a fuss there would be!

I thought Englishmen were too cold-blooded for that sort of thing."

Di's heart beat afresh with fear. If they should fight— her mind refused to take in the thought of a duel with all its dreadful possibilities. She was depressed with a vague sense of danger and dismay and disgust, and hardly noticed when Mrs. St. John rose to leave. She did not listen to her parting salutation.

"Well, it's about time I was going, anyway. I've got some perfectly lovely things: come and see them, and tell me more about that girl. I'm dying to hear how it goes off."

She did not look round till Mrs. Gordon called to her softly.

"Oh, she is horrid!" she said, going forward to her friend, still indignant. "Why didn't she stay in Paris?"

"She would have stayed if she could." Mrs. Gordon looked amused.

"But she hasn't a 'well-managed husband,'" said Di with great disdain.

"You mustn't take her foolish talk so to heart. Your friend Philippa would tell you to laugh at it all. She wouldn't mind it."

"She would. You none of you understand Philippa, not even you, I think, who understand everybody." She sat down, and laid her head against the edge of the sofa. "If you can

be kind to that dreadful Mrs. St. John, why are you cruel to Philippa?"

"Am I cruel to her? I didn't know it."

"You think she did this thing, but she didn't. She would never frighten poor Miss Piper so; and let them fight a duel for her!"

"No, I think she wouldn't. You must take the duel as a picturesque detail added by Mrs. St. John."

"She is in trouble. I wish she would come and talk to you, for I can't tell you about it."

"Not if she doesn't wish me to know."

"Yes," said Di dubiously, "I suppose I mustn't tell you. I don't think she would like it talked about. Oh, I think there is a great deal of trouble in the world."

"Have you found that out already, my child; and you are only—how old?"

"Nearly nineteen. Does one need to be so very old to know that? I dare say I knew it before; but I never thought of these things till lately."

There are times when to say nothing is best. Mrs. Gordon was one of those rare women who hold that when you have not the right word to say it is better to say nothing. The beneficent love and tenderness that help us in our need, can they not reach us though the lips are closed?

There was a stillness, more soothing than any speech, in the large, sunny room, hardly invaded now by any sound from the outer world. After a time, Mrs. Gordon raised herself painfully, and leaned a moment on her elbow. She sank back again among the pillows with a smile. And so, in a perfect and serene calm, the day went on; the sunlight died from off the wall, and the lights changed.

By-and-by there was another appeal at the door. This time it was Felix Chester who was the visitor. He brought some of the departed sunshine with him.

"I've come for the cup of tea Miss Barbara promised me," he said, going up to Mrs. Gordon, who was already counted among his old friends, though he had seen her but some half-dozen times in all.

She smiled an answer to the bright young face and the bright, fresh voice; but she held up a finger in warning.

"Softly!" she said. "She is tired."

Felix stepped with elaborate care round the sofa, and stood a moment looking down.

Deonys, wearied with her conflicting thoughts, had fallen asleep; her face was turned up to the light, "tired eyelids upon tired eyes." Felix's face did not lose its smile, but it took a staider, more absorbed expression. Something head

made the young man suddenly think of the best poetry he knew, the poetry that expresses the fairest and purest emotions that life holds. Then he turned and went quickly to the further window.

CHAPTER III.

"And as for love; God wot, I love not yet;
But love I shall, God willing."

A MOMENT later the girl stirred. Slowly she came back from the dream world where she had wandered, and consciousness dawned in her sweet eyes. She lifted her hand, and pushed back her hair.

"Have I been asleep?" she said. "Oh, how dreadful of me! And our talk——"

She paused, for her glance had strayed to the further window, where Felix stood, dark against the fading light. Her wavering colour rose as she recognized him; a sudden timidity seized her.

"Have I missed the sunset?" she asked; and, without waiting for a reply, she rose and went across the room to a distant balcony that looked upon the plain.

The salon was very large. You had the sense of living in it almost as in the open air,

The north, the south, and the west looked in at the many casements; every subtle change of weather and all the sunshine of the year visited it.

The last of many houses in a straggling suburb, there was on this side nothing but a red-tiled roof or two between it and the long sweep of undulating land – the plain that might seemingly roll on for ever, but for the sharp arrest of the snow mountains thirty miles away. There was not a single sign of life about it, not a single figure to break its sad monotony, hardly a stunted tree relieved against the sky. To most people it might seem a stony desolation, dreary and pitiless in its barrenness; a bit of the happy earth given over to a slow death. But Deonys knew better. She had seen its resurrection in the spring time. Even so early as February it would put on its youth and its greenness; even in its November sombreness of brown and grey and tarnished gold it had its own beauty for those who had eyes to see it. Where you have so wide and open a country you have a wide sky and infinite changes of silvery light, of cloud, and of shadow. Deonys had come too late for this burning glow of the sunset; but the after-tints lingered, the daffodil that succeeds the deep orange, the faint rose that follows the fire. In the blue-grey of the

early November twilight the colour quickly fades; soon the plain grew shadowy; the mountain-line against the sky, apt to be too sharply urgent at mid-day, lost its definiteness, and seemed with every moment to recede. There were stars coming out one by one slowly.

It was time, and more than time, to turn away, but Di lingered. It was very peaceful, and she loved it well. She knew that Felix Chester had come out, and was standing at her side. She did not want to turn round and to take up the burden of other people's vexations and troubles, or their joys, as it might be, just yet. This one little moment she wanted for herself.

Yet, when at last she looked at him, he was not silently laughing at her, as she feared. He was looking out at the gathering dusk, with a face as grave as her own.

"It is like the sea—like what I think the sea must be," she said, with sudden confidence, feeling that he understood.

"And that the other line of coast?" he said, pointing to the dim outline against the horizon. "I have seen it look just so in its calmest moods, when you can hardly hear the faint wash of water on the beach. And that might be an island I know well, far up in the north. The mountains rise with just the same sort of

abruptness from the shore; and in winter they are snow-capped, too."

"I am glad it is like. I have never seen the sea."

"Never?" he said surprised.

"Perhaps when I was a baby, but I don't remember. It is a long way to the baths, where the Spaniards go."

"But do you stay here all summer? Isn't it dreadfully hot?"

"Sometimes we go to Aranjuez, where there are trees. It isn't so very cool there, either; but papa likes it. I have been in the south, too; but not in Cadiz or Gibraltar."

"I have seen Cadiz. It is very white; and the sea very blue—not like our grey northern waters—and everywhere all over the little town you have the strong scent of the brine. You can't forget how near the Atlantic is."

"I should like to go. Isn't it odd that I should be English, and that I should never have looked at any bit of water bigger than a pond?"

"You will see the 'silver streak' we are so proud of, one day. I wish I might be there when you see it for the first time."

"Oh, I shouldn't talk much, I think," she said, looking at him rather archly. She had forgotten her shyness for the moment. "Why

do people always call out and exclaim about anything that is beautiful? It takes away all the sacredness of it."

"Yes," said Felix. "I hate a fellow who has always his whole stock of adjectives at hand to pour out on the first thing that turns up."

How Ralph would have laughed behind his beard if he could have heard this speech!

"And, besides, if it is like this, it will seem an old friend."

"Oh, but it isn't like this. This is only a little like it in one of its humours—its best and quietest humour; but it has as many whims and caprices as—as some beautiful ladies I know," he finished, with a laugh.

Di glanced at him wistfully. Was he thinking of Philippa? she wondered; and had anything happened to make him count her fickle? No, that could not be. His words reminded her of that burden of alien troubles she had forgotten for a little, and all the pleasantness of the moment vanished.

"It is time to go in," she said; and [illegible] back into the dazzle of lights.

Miss Barbara had returned, and there was a clinking of spoons, as she arranged the cups.

"How do you do, child?" she said abruptly,

presenting her cheek to be kissed. "You are alone? That's right."

"Did you expect the padre? But you wouldn't have said anything so very uncomplimentary if you did."

"Expect your father!" said Miss Barbara, with an air of wonderful contempt, as if that would be foolishness indeed. "I'm not one to mince my words, Di; and what I mean is this —you stick to your own people, the people that have known you all your days, since you were a helpless baby, and don't you be enticed away by strangers. My dear, old friends are best."

"I hope never to forget old friends," said the girl a little proudly.

She knew as well as if Miss Barbara had said it in so many words, that this was a warning against Philippa. This ugly gossip about her must have reached this distant quarter, too. She sat silent, with hot cheeks, afraid even to ask after Miss Piper, in case that innocent question might bring out another version of the report in Miss Barbara's unvarnished speech.

She need not have been afraid. Miss Barbara sat very erect, with ominous grimness, and lips tightly pursed against disclosure. There were some things girls ought not to know anything about, and she wasn't going to put nonsense

into Di's head. The child would be thinking it necessary to have a lover next.

Di did not know that Miss Barbara, who made it her duty once every week to visit, admonish, guide, and direct Miss Piper in the way she should go, had set out that day on purpose to reproach and overwhelm the little spinster with shame.

Confronted with the rumour, Miss Piper had confessed that it was true. Philippa had come to her house twice, but only twice, to meet the Englishman, about whom everybody was talking.

Miss Barbara had declared witheringly that she despised underhand ways, and that, considering her years and her grey hairs, Miss Piper might have had more sense.

Then the little lady, stung by these reproaches, had burst out weeping. It was cruel to taunt her with her experience—she who had always desired to keep her youthful feelings, and who had counselled young people to think twice, and implored them to be in no haste to marry. And what could she do? Miss Henshaw was a beautiful young lady and in great distress, and who could refuse her? And she, Miss Piper, had been so alarmed and upset, and had lain awake ever since, dreading that Mr. Ferryman might come back alone and upbraid her for

advising Philippa not to bind herself. What should she have done, then—a lonely woman with an angry man in the house?

It was a confused story, told with an eager endeavour to shield Philippa, and yet showing clearly with what reluctance the little spinster had yielded, and how in her own weak way she had suffered.

Miss Barbara, relentless in her cross-examination, had learned but two facts that Mrs. Henshaw did not know of these meetings, and that Miss Henshaw did not mean to marry this gentleman. To have secured a stolen interview with a favoured lover might possibly have been pardoned, though Miss Barbara clung to the decorous, ceremonious love-making of her youth; but to meet a man clandestinely—for some mysterious reason known to nobody—that was not to be forgiven her. Not all Philippa's pretty speeches could reinstate her in the lady's good graces. The memory of the night when she had met with that blank refusal at Mrs. Henshaw's door still rankled.

"When people make light of the truth they will stick at nothing," she said severely. "And what kind of wife will she make—a girl who has been trained like that?"

"My dear," she said solemnly to Di, who was sipping her hot tea in haste to be gone,

"'Thine own friends and thy father's forsake not.' You've been but little here of late, and that's not pretty behaviour to Mrs. Gordon and me who have known you all your days. And it's my duty to warn you, child, if you think to pass us by for certain folks we won't name, you'll live to repent it."

There was real feeling under the veil of severity, and the girl was touched.

"I will come again soon," she said. "I must go now; it is getting quite dark."

Miss Barbara's warning was kindly meant, but it was impossible to accept it. Was not Mrs. Henshaw her father's friend too—an older friend than these? and Philippa—how could she forsake her?

She went over to Mrs. Gordon's sofa, where Felix was lingering.

"Will you lend me Maria?" she whispered. "The padre would scold if I went alone."

"Yes, dear child; I never dreamt of your going alone. Ring, and I will tell Maria to hasten her toilet. Perhaps we can persuade her to go without her Sunday mantilla."

"May I go?" said Felix eagerly, coming forward. "Do let me see you home, Miss Ouvry. I've nothing to do for an hour or more yet. Miss Barbara will tell you I'm a most staid and worthy young man."

"You may let me speak for myself, I think," said that lady, quitting her teacups. "The best I ever said of you is that you might be worse."

"Nowadays that is an irreproachable character," said Felix, knowing himself to be a favourite. "Miss Quvry, after that testimonial, will you go with me?"

"I am taking you away——"

"Miss Barbara will thank you for that," said this audacious young man. "And it will spare Maria's feelings."

"Of course she'll go. She knows very well there's no getting Maria back when once you let her out."

Di was the only one who did not think this arrangement very comfortable. She would much rather have had Maria.

The young man, as he very well knew, had made a good impression on the two solitary ladies. They liked his frankness, his youth, his sunny temper—what might be called the artlessness of his abundant candour—as women do, who have left all these things behind them. "He might have been my son," the mother of lost children used to think as she listened to his outpourings. "He might have been my brother;" Miss Barbara remembered the one strong and tender affection of her life.

He tossed back his head, lounged in the best chair, crumpled the antimacassars, poured out his confidences to the one lady and openly laughed at the other, and they both liked it. Di, who was precious to them both, might be trusted to his care.

"He won't put silly notions into her head; he's a lad of principle for all his lightness," was Miss Barbara's too trusting verdict as she saw them set out. "And Di is but a bairn yet. If I thought she would fall into that other girl's ways——"

"I've a fine story to tell you, Mary, now that we are alone," she said, going back to her sister's sofa, but first carefully shutting the door, and making a minute search behind all the larger pieces of furniture, as if the eaves-dropper might by chance be lurking there. "It's all true. I made that silly body Amelia Piper tell me everything."

"Mrs. St. John has been here."

"Then it's all over the town already, depend on it."

While she told her tale, with much head-shaking and severe comment, the two, who were both keenly interested in the same matter, walked through the lighted streets without so much as remotely hinting at it. Di was relieved that her companion was silent, and yet

sorry. If she could have summoned courage, there was a word she would fain have said, but the moment to say it did not come.

"You were speaking of the sea in the north," she said. "Have you ever been in Scotland?"

"Yes. I was thinking of an island up there when we looked at the plain. It's a solitary enough place, and I dare say you never heard of it."

"What is it called?" she asked, with a note of eagerness in her voice.

"St. Lasrian. After some forgotten saint, I suppose."

"Oh, but I do know all about it!" she cried. "That is just my island."

"Your island?"

"Yes. And I wonder when you were there if you ever met my cousin Bell?"

"Bell," he repeated, with fine gravity. "Miss Bell—— "

"Fullarton," said Di promptly. "Have you met her?"

Now, on this special island with the saintly name there are almost as many Fullartons as there are trees. Felix recalled his friend's gamekeeper, his boatman, the postmistress, the minister, the minister's man; the farmer on the hill above, the farmer in the valley below, but

for a Miss Bell Fullarton he searched his memory in vain.

"I am afraid——" he began, feeling wonderfully disappointed. "Can you tell me where she lives? It isn't a big place, but there is such a clan of them. They are as thick as the famous Vallombrosa leaves."

"Kylmure. At least, I write to her there sometimes; but I think she once told me she sent some distance for her letters."

Felix went in imagination all over the little hamlet by the sea. He ordered the inhabitants to turn out for review; he did miles of walking over hills and glens in that brief moment of pondering, but he did not catch the most distant glimpse of Miss Bell Fullarton.

"What is she like?" he asked, as a last chance, as if it were probable he should be familiar with her face and not have heard her name in that distant little colony, where everybody knows all about you, from the first hour of your arrival.

"I can't tell you," said Di; and they both laughed. "I have never seen her. She is my only cousin. Her mother was papa's half-sister, and she died a long time ago. Bell must be quite old."

"Oh, an old lady! There is an old Miss Fullarton, who live in a glen near Kylmure.

She wears a 'mutch'—do you know what a 'mutch' is?—and she goes about with a big walking-stick."

"Oh, but that can't be Bell. I didn't mean old like that—only not a girl. I don't know what her age is, but she always writes as if she thought me quite a child; and sometimes she tells me that this is a degenerate age, and that nobody can do things as they were done long ago, and it is that that makes me think that she is old."

"But you don't believe her? All that talk about the perfection of the past is humbug, you know."

"Well, perhaps. I don't think I want anything changed. And what is the use of always wishing you were your own grandmother? You can't change yourself into her."

"Heaven forbid!" said Felix lightly. "Fortunately, no amount of trying can bring about the transformation."

"Bell is very clever. She has found out a great many things. She has found out that English people are all shallow"

"Do you call that a sign of genius?"

Di laughed at his tragic air.

"And she says I ought to be very thankful to be Scotch. But I think, if people are nice, it doesn't much matter where they were born, does it?"

"No," said Felix. "I've a host of friends in the north, but if one's only chance of virtue lay in being a Scot, that would be a poor look-out for you and me; for, Miss Bell may say what she likes, she can't claim you for a countrywoman when you've never even seen the land of the thistle."

"Papa is half Scotch, and so Bell admits me into the clan; but mamma was English, I think. I hear from Bell just twice every year; she writes to me at Christmas, and I answer her letter, and then she writes to me again in June. But I'm afraid my letters are very stupid; I never know what to say."

"You can't bewail the present and lament the past?"

"Well, no. I am quite satisfied with the present."

"And so she writes to you in June. If I am up there then, perhaps you will let me be the bearer of your answer. If I was very meek and proper, don't you think I might persuade her that there are one or two who have the misfortune to call themselves English, and who are yet not wholly and irrecoverably bad?"

Di laughed.

"I wish I could see her," she said. "She is the only relation I have in the world, except papa."

"You will let me take that letter?"

"Oh yes. And some day you will tell me about Kylmure?"

They had reached the open entrance to the house, and the portress had thrust her head out of her glass box, and was dangling the key on her finger.

"Papa must be out," Di said, noticing this. "Perhaps some other time——" She turned to him hesitatingly.

"May I?" he asked eagerly. "May I call on you some day—some evening? I should like to know Mr. Ouvry better—Ralph has often talked of him," said this cunning youth—"if he wouldn't think me a bore? And I will tell you all about St. Lasrian, the island of mountain and sea."

"Yes, come," said Di, holding out her hand frankly. "Papa will like to see you very much, and——"

She paused, startled by a fleeting glimpse of a face that looked in upon them from the street, and vanished in a moment.

"What was it? Did anything frighten you?" he asked.

He stepped to the door and glanced out. Mr. Ferryman's retreating figure, revealed by the light of a lamp under which he passed, was easily recognized. Felix involuntarily felt in

his pocket for a letter he had that morning received—a letter from his old friend Smith, of Liverpool. A grim smile settled about his lips. He muttered something under his breath.

"You were alarmed," he said, turning back to her. "That fellow——"

"No, no," said Di eagerly; "he did nothing to frighten me—nothing at all. It was silly of me to be startled."

"If I thought——" he began, with a darkening brow.

"It was nothing," she interrupted him. In her eagerness to assure him, she laid her hand on his sleeve, forgetting her timidity. She remembered only that dreadful rumour of the young men's hatred towards each other, of the possibility of their coming to blows. It had been forgotten while they talked, and now it all came back to her with a sudden pain.

"Oh, don't do anything to make him angry," she said, feeling that she must speak. "Don't quarrel with him. He is cruel. He would have no pity."

"Thank you," said Felix very gently. "You are too good, too kind, to think of me."

"And you will—you will take care?"

"Yes, I will take care," he answered, with a smile. "He will not harm me."

She stood, with parted lips and wide eyes,

looking after him as he went, not hearing the loud salutations of the portress, who had watched this little scene. She could not conquer the faint dread at her heart, the throb of sudden fear she had felt when that dark, angry face looked into her own.

Felix crossed the square with his head very erect. It seemed to him that only to talk to this young girl, to feel the touch of her hand on his arm, to look into her pleading eyes, had conferred some new grace on him. It was his knight's investiture. He felt richer, better.

Yet, when he reached his room, and pulled out the letter, the old expression of half-cynical humour returned to his lips. It was another lady he had promised to defend, not this one, whom he blessed for her kind thought of him. He glanced at his watch. "Time for our little appointment. Harm me?" He laughed aloud. "No, Felix, my boy, it will do you a world of good."

Straightway he pulled his cap over his brows and marched out of the house.

CHAPTER IV.

"The quarrel is a very pretty quarrel as it stands; we should only spoil it by trying to explain it."

When you are full of fears, shaken by forebodings, troubled touching the safety of one about whom a little spring of interest has risen within you, you may be forgiven for feeling the expression of your neighbour's frank contentment a little oppressive.

Thus Deonys, having done nothing more than take off her hat with slow fingers, while her mind was rapidly following Felix's retreating figure, was as nearly cross as it was possible for one of her sweet-tempered nature to be, when an arm suddenly encircled her waist, and she felt herself whirled about the salon in a giddy waltz.

"Philippa, let me go," she cried, struggling to be free. "What do you mean?"

"There!" said Philippa, bringing her with the last turn to the safe anchorage of the old

sofa, "wasn't that neatly done? I call that a nice piece of piloting, with all these peninsulas and islands and reefs of furniture in the way. Don't you feel better, my child?"

"Philippa, I don't understand you."

Deonys threw off her jacket. She was hot and tired and a trifle indignant.

"I don't understand myself," she answered, dancing slowly down the room. "It's such a rare sensation for Philippa Henshaw to be on good terms with herself. Di, don't you think I've grown an inch or two since you saw me?" She came to a pause before her friend. "I can stand it, you know. I'm not 'tall to reach the pole,' like the man in Mr. Watts's verses."

She drew herself up and lifted her chin.

"I feel morally bigger, at any rate."

"I wish you would talk sense," said Di, in a melancholy little voice. "I suppose you have got something to say?"

"To say? I could shout it aloud, if it weren't for shocking Mr. Ouvry."

"Papa is out; but I wish you wouldn't shout. I'm tired."

"Tired? you poor little woman! What has made you tired?"

Philippa went and knelt down before the sofa. "Tell me about it. What did it?"

"Oh, things," said Di lucidly.

"What things?" Philippa asked turning up her face inquisitively.

"I don't know—about you, some of them."

"About me? This grows serious."

"Yes, horrid gossip. Don't ask me about it."

"Where have you been?" Philippa asked, flushing slightly.

"At Mrs. Gordon's. Mrs. St. John came in. Oh, I forgot, you don't know her."

"If one may judge by your voice," said Philippa merrily, "I don't lose much."

"No, she isn't nice; she says horrid things. There, don't let us speak about her."

"But if she has been speaking about me? Di," she said impulsively, "she can't have told you my great news. You surely would have looked a little glad——"

"What news?" Di asked quickly.

Was it true, then, that Felix—— And yet he had said nothing.

"Quick, tell me," she said.

"He has left," said Philippa, with brief impressiveness.

"Who has left?"

"Why, Di!" cried Philippa, giving her a little shake, "where are your thoughts wandering to? *He*, of course, that man—that tallow, soap, cotton, Manchester man. I can't bear even to call him by his name."

"But I saw him five minutes ago." Di stared at her friend.

"Oh, you literal child, he is going to-night, in an hour or so, by the express. I dare say he would be glad to leave this minute, but, unfortunately, they won't alter the train service, even for an enraged lover."

"Are you sure—are you quite sure?"

"My dear, I shall bless 'business' all my life. It's a rise in the market, or a fall in the market, I'm sure I don't know which—that is my rival."

"You are sure?" Di asked again, with a quick, eager light in her eyes. "There is no mistake, he is going to-night by the early train? He will only have time to pack up his things; not to see any one."

"No," said Philippa, laughing and wondering. "Were you anxious to say good-bye to him?"

"I?" She put out her hand with a gesture of disgust. "Oh, I am glad!" She gave a great sigh.

Philippa looked at her grave face wistfully. Her eyes were absently fixed on the window, her thoughts far distant.

"Are you thinking of me at all?" she said at last gently.

Di moved her head, and the light returned to her eyes.

"Now we can be comfortable again. The old times will come back," she said.

It was like waking out of an ugly nightmare. For the moment the great news was enough—the sense of deliverance from a brooding fear; but presently a wonder, as to how it all came about, crept in.

"How did it happen?" she asked. "Tell me about it."

"The money was paid. Mamma paid it." Philippa looked down on the carpet.

"But I thought——" She paused, suddenly aware that she was about to say a rude thing.

"You thought she hadn't the money to give?" The words were spoken with a visible effort.

"I am very glad I was wrong," Di said, in a low voice.

"You were quite right, she hadn't it to give, I believe; but she got it—somehow. I don't want to know anything about it. Don't you understand how much better it is for [illegible] not to know anything?" she said urgently. "It was honestly got, and the man took it, and there is an end of it. He is going away; and I [illegible] I'll never, never see him again!"

Something in this speech made the listener feel strangely uncomfortable. Philippa had saved herself, but—— Di hated herself for that

"but,"—that underlying doubt. She passed over everything in her answer, except the last words.

"You need never see him again. He won't put himself in your way, if it was only the money he wanted after all."

"Oh, he wanted me, too, as a sort of expensive ornament to his house, the newest artistic decoration," said Philippa, with a smile curling her lips; "but, as he could not get me, he was glad enough to take the sum he paid for me. It would have been hard for him to lose both."

"Wait a minute," said Di, who had listened with a divided mind. "I think, after all, I will tell you what they are saying about you."

"Do," said Philippa, with some bitterness. "It is so nice to know what people's candid opinion of you is."

"They say you made appointments with him at Miss Piper's. I told them there wasn't a word of truth in it; but I want you to tell Miss Barbara so yourself. You mustn't mind if I think of Miss Piper first; she is such an old friend, and any gossip like that would hurt her so much. Miss Barbara wouldn't spare her, I'm afraid."

"But it is true."

The hot colour flamed into Philippa's cheeks, as she met the wondering reproach of Di's eyes.

"Oh, Di, was there anything so dreadfully wrong in it? I thought it was the safest place to go, and I had to meet him. You can suppose it wasn't for pleasure I went."

"Miss Barbara will never forgive her—never; and Miss Piper leans so on her opinion, though she is afraid of her. Oh, it was cruel!"

"I meant no harm," Philippa pleaded, looking into the flushed, indignant face. "She was—— Oh, do forgive me, but I must laugh," she said, dimpling all over. "If you saw her dress, and the preparations she made—all the miniatures were labelled, that he might take in her pedigree at a glance—one would have thought it was she who was going to reject him, and not I."

"I see nothing to laugh at," said Di coldly. "I am sure you made her very unhappy."

"But think of her age," said Philippa plaintively. "She must be ever so much older than your father. I will go down on my knees to Miss Barbara, if you like, and tell her it was all my fault. Di, don't look so unmerciful. I meant no harm."

"That man!" said Di, with an expressive action of the hands. "She who is so timid!"

"She wasn't present," said Philippa eagerly. "Since I am confessing, let me tell you everything. I had to meet him. There were things

I had to get back—letters and other things he was mean enough to keep, to hold over me."

"Letters?" Di echoed, wondering when she was to understand the whole of the affair. "So you corresponded?"

"You press me cruelly," said Philippa, with rising agitation. "It was only at first. He wrote to me, and I had to answer. Mamma made me. No," she corrected herself, "that isn't honest, I did it of my own accord. But I had no sooner done it than I repented. That is my way. My repentances are like the American storm-warnings, they always come too late to be of any use."

She looked up with a suspicion of a smile, but Di would not be betrayed into amusement. She was very solemn.

"I can't think how you could ever make up your mind to write at all."

"I told you I repented"—this with a little pout—"in sackcloth and ashes, or at least in a waterproof and thick boots, like a 'personally conducted' young woman. We were in Rome then, and I didn't allow myself a single pretty thing; and, if you knew the Roman shops, you would understand what that means. We were so far away, and it all seemed so distant, and I had almost forgotten how hateful his presence had been to me. But I have suffered for it. I

don't think, in spite of my act of penance, I have ever respected myself since."

"You got them back?"

Di tried without marked success to speak sympathetically.

"Yes, oh yes, I got them back. If I did wrong I was well punished for it. I think that was about the worst half-hour I have had in my life," she said bitterly; "and I've had some moments that you wouldn't envy me. But I got them back, and I put them in the fire, and reduced them to ashes. I wish I could burn out the remembrance of that hateful time as easily."

She turned away her head. Something in the dejected attitude, in the rare sadness of the bright, beautiful face, touched Di and brought back her wavering allegiance.

"Never mind," she said with fire tenderness, "it's all over now, and we can begin again. To-morrow, I will go and see Miss Piper."

"And I will go with you," said Philippa, brightening under this kindness. No," she corrected herself with quick intuition; "I dare say you would like best to go alone. Poor little woman! I believe it reconciled her to everything to know that I sent him away; and yet she couldn't help being kind to him and trying to soften the blow. She wanted to show him

the miniatures—perhaps the sight of that fat old Mrs. Piper, with the wonderful turban, might have served as a warning, for she was a sylph, like me, once, it seems—but he had the grace to take leave. Indeed, I would never have let him annoy her."

"I should hope not. Philippa," she asked suddenly, "what made you play that day your mother lunched with us?"

"It was a triumphal march." She looked up with mischievous archness. "I couldn't help it. I got my letters back that morning; and I took the chance of being alone to make a funeral pyre. After burning my past, it seemed the right thing to do to begin life with music—a sort of flourish of trumpets to announce my return from captivity. I'm afraid it wasn't very well received, was it? Did it spoil your lunch?"

"Don't talk about it, it is done, let us bury it, too," said Di, rising to put an end to further confidences. She would not ask any questions, but it needed a very slight effort of memory to feel certain that Mrs. Henshaw had at that time found no means of repaying the debt she had contracted. With what arguments, then—with what further promises, cajolements, protests—had Philippa prevailed in her interview with so hard a creditor? How had she got back the letters?

She put away from her, as much as was possible, her creeping doubt, but she could not so easily silence it. She remembered the scenes of the past weeks vividly, as we remember the first moment of disenchantment, the hour in which "some dear expectation dies." But doubt with her never meant less love, rather more. One might so easily be wrong in mistrusting another, but one could never love too much, she would have said if she had cared to analyze her feeling at all.

As it was, she only kissed Philippa, and went, like a prosaic young person, to put away her hat and inspect the contents of the larder, intent on making of the simple supper a little feast to mark what Philippa was pleased to call her return from bondage.

Next day, while she was paying that visit of sympathy to Miss Piper, trembling in her high dove cot under Miss Barbara's displeasure, Ralph Malleson was speeding from the south to the north.

The day was hot, and the journey tiresome, since it had ceased to have any novelty for him. He was glad to be returning home, but irritated by the slow rate at which the miles decreased. There was but one other occupant of the carriage—a man whose head and face were completely enveloped in the folds of his cape,

revealing nothing but the tip of a frosty nose. Malleson wasted a great deal of speculation on this silent figure. The desire to have a glimpse of his remaining features grew urgent. He had an uncanny sense of a sombre eye keeping watch on all his restless movements. He coughed, he changed his seat, raised and lowered the windows without result. The man grew to have a kind of fascination for him. Should he speak aloud and force a reply from this motionless mummy, and so break the spell?

While he was debating within himself what to say, the train slowed and finally came to a stand at a station; the figure in the corner roused itself, gathered about it its shawls, rugs, heavy hooded cloak, and silently made its exit from the carriage. Ralph poked his head out of the window and examined the platform, but in vain —his dumb companion had vanished. He always afterwards declared that he had travelled with a ghost, and made a very neat and thrilling little story out of it for the wonderment of his friends.

He got out, and by way of enlivenment purchased all the newspapers he could lay his hands on, and these were not few. The station was of considerable size; but there were not many travellers, and the guard, driver and other officials alighted for a social squabble

over rival politics. Nobody seemingly was in any hurry, and apparently the chief business of the hour was the readjusting of the affairs of the kingdom. Before the bell rang and the loitering passengers took their seats, Spain had passed through a tremendous crisis, and emerged the first of European Powers.

Malleson had, meantime, made a notable collection of literature of every shade and hue. For a time he read diligently: now a courteous reminder to Amadeo that the air of Italy would benefit his constitution, and that Spain, the noble and generous, would make no mean haggling over the price of a ticket (not a return one) for that country; now the latest Carlist scare, or the newest manifesto of the Montpensarists, the Isabella faction, the Radicals, Democrats, Socialists; the hundred and one parties struggling for the mastery, each of them expressing frank and cordial hatred of the others. All this is apt to be depressing, even to a sanguine spirit unliable to pessimistic fears. Malleson tossed the flimsy sheets aside, and fell, by way of a little cheer, to thinking about himself.

A great authority has lately told us that history, by virtue of its being a travelling in the past, is a species of culture. One's own history—so immensely more important to oneself

than that of a nation—ought, then, to be a very refining and improving study. Malleson found it easy to argue thus, but less easy to extract any "sweetness or light" out of his own ended story. As for the future, well, was it so impossible that the future should redeem the days that were gone? Must the past always dominate his life? Might not he, too, put out his hand and claim the days to come as others did? It was a bold thought, but it had for him a great charm.

It is dreary work, this looking behind over the long-travelled road of sorrowful experience; but for the unseen way in front there is always the sunshine of hope. For a little while he gave himself up to the entertainment of this vision of a larger, more vivid life that might yet be his. The thought of it brought others to his memory, and prevented, to the great benefit of his temper, a too-exclusive dwelling on himself.

There was Felix—what rash adventures had that quixotic youth been engaged in? and Philippa, that fair enslaver, how many new conquests had she made? And Di—it is not needful to state that Di hardly came third in the order of his thoughts. There was great restfulness in every memory of this young girl with the frank, serious eyes. He had brought

some trifling trinkets for her and her friend from a famous silversmith's in Seville. He took out the little packet, and, unwrapping the thin paper, laid them on the seat before him, pleasing himself hugely with the thought of her pleasure. He would go soon—that night, perhaps—and present them. He pictured her girlish delight when he produced the chain of many fragile links, and the silver arrow, such as he had seen German maidens wear in their thick brown braids.

Thus restored to good humour, he was ready to welcome a number of fellow travellers when the train stopped at the last station before the capital. All the new-comers were smoking cigarettes; but between the meditative puffs they talked, with much politeness and pomp of phrase; politics, gossip, scandal, perhaps. Malleson listened vaguely, thinking chiefly of his supper. At the last moment something was said that arrested his wandering thoughts, something touching the latest manifestation of English oddity. "A duel," said one, "in which both combatants were killed." "No, no," corrected another; "a much more tame affair—no question of wounds at all. A little punishment administered in the English fashion —what you call a match of boxing; a mere trifle—not a drop of blood spilt." A third sug-

gested, with great civility, that a horsewhip was the instrument employed, and added some harrowing particulars as to the state of the victim. The occasion of the quarrel alone seemed a matter beyond dispute. In the land of chivalry and honour, and other high-sounding words, you might make quite certain that there was a lady in the background. The story might have gone through endless variations but that the bustle of arrival cut it short.

Ralph jumped out, grim, but determined, thinking no longer of his supper. Felix, that impulsive youth, must first be found and called to give an account of himself before he could wash off the stains of travel, or sit down to a comfortable meal.

He threw himself into a cab, drove straight to the hotel, and ran up to his cousin's rooms. There were evident signs of the young man's recent presence, lavish comfort, and equally lavish untidiness, but the owner himself was nowhere visible. The door of the bedroom stood open, and he walked in. It was with a feeling of relief that he found the bed unoccupied, except by certain stray possessions, overflowings of Felix's extensive wardrobe, which had found convenient resting-place there. He had half expected to discover a sick and sorrowful penitent, ready to submit

meekly to his reproaches; but, though he was relieved to find himself mistaken, he was annoyed at Felix's absence. The armchair looked very inviting after a lengthened railway journey, and from below came savoury odours of dinner.

He rushed here and there in growing wrath, hungry and cross. The boy had vanished, leaving no trace behind. In his further search for him, Ralph encountered the story with which Madrid was, for the moment, amusing itself over and over again. It took as many subtle forms as a tale whispered in that game we call Russian scandal, which, passing from ear to ear, comes out finally in an entirely new dress. The only particular to which every one stuck obstinately was that which made Felix the fair-haired the victor.

At last, after much expenditure of time and temper, the young man, about whom gossip was busy, was discovered in a remote eating-house.

"What is this that I hear about you?" Ralph said, as sternly as he could, waving off the boy's joyful welcome.

Felix shrugged his shoulders.

"How can I tell?" he said lightly. "What are they kind enough to say about me?"

"Say about you! Oh, they are making a fine story of it. You've made the place too

hot to hold you, I can tell you," said Ralph grimly. "What have you done with that man?"

"With what man?" said Felix innocently.

"Come, I'm in earnest." Ralph spoke irritably. "Out with it. What have you been about?"

"Done with him?" Felix stared, and then he burst out laughing. "Do they say I have cooked and eaten him, and hidden the bones in the cellar, or garrotted him, or given him a blow from behind, or——"

"Or fought a duel with him?" said Malleson dryly. "Suppose you come to the truth."

"A duel!" said Felix contemptuously. "So that is the story! Not very likely. Do you suppose a mean hound like that had pluck enough to fight, even if I had challenged him?"

"Where is he now?"

Felix's eyes had a suspicious twinkle in them.

"In bed at Avila, if he's a wise man."

"There is some foundation for all this fine talk, I suppose?"

"Very likely; but Spanish imagination is accountable for a good deal of embellishment. The fellow was insolent, and I let him know it."

"What business was it of yours?" growled the older man. "You are always in scrapes."

"I begun with reminding him of a few

trifling particulars about himself," Felix went on, "which I happened to learn, and then I gave him a little instruction in manners. I'm afraid he wasn't grateful—not at all grateful." He laughed at the remembrance of the scene.

"You are not to be trusted," said Ralph, walking angrily up and down, his hands thrust in his pockets. The room was almost empty, and he spoke in English, secure in not being understood. "You might have thought of the flood of gossip you would let loose about the ladies you were so eager to defend."

"Pooh! It will never reach them."

"You are a rash, hot-headed boy. Will you ever learn sense?"

"Oh yes," said Felix, with perfect temper, laying his hand on his friend's shoulder, "when I am as old as you. Look here, old man, you are hungry. Come and eat my supper." He pulled him without much resistance to the table. "Do you smell that stew? Sit down, sit down, and tuck this napkin under your chin. I'll tell you everything when you have fed, but defend me from the criticism of a starving man!

CHAPTER V.

"But when Alasnam came to consult the mirror, the glass, fatal touchstone, was dimmed."

"Do you know what every one will think—what they will confidently expect to happen next?"

Felix had made his confession, as he had promised, but not until his cousin's appetite had been appeased, and his asperity softened by an excellent meal. The friends were walking under the starlight to Malleson's rooms, in the northern suburb. Felix had been very frank, and Ralph was reassured. The affair had been a mere bit of boyish indiscretion, and, in spite of his apparent disapproval, he found in his heart some sympathy for the lad's chivalrous impulse.

"I wasn't going to have them insulted," said Felix, with his chin in the air, "and stand by tamely. I did him no harm, though he made a precious row." He laughed, as he did at every remembrance of his valour.

"Did she appeal to you?" Ralph had asked, not without a shade of contempt in his voice.

"Miss Henshaw?"

"Miss Henshaw, of course."

"No," said Felix shortly, "she did not."

He was very reticent on this point. He said nothing at all of an appeal that had been made to him by the other lady, and which he had promptly met. There were some things that, for all his ready frankness, he carried in his heart, and never told his friend.

They had reached the door of the house where Malleson had rooms. He whistled on the watchman, whose light was visible in the distance; and while they waited for the key, Ralph turned round and asked that question:—

"Do you know what every one will think—what they will confidently expect to happen next?"

He was capable of using this threat as an argument in his irritation, but he knew it was a weak subterfuge.

Felix surprised him by saying nothing at all. Silence on this young man's part was at all times significant.

"So—— There are more confessions to come!" he said a little dryly.

He laid his hand on the boy's shoulder. Felix shook it off almost roughly.

"Why should I mind what people choose to expect?" he cried. "I'm not going to dance to their piping. Look here, Ralph, I dare say you mean well, and I've always told you everything, but you can push a fellow too far, you know."

"All right. I'll restrain my devouring curiosity," Ralph said calmly, examining this new mood with interest.

"There's nothing to be curious about. When there is, I'll let you know. If you think I'm going to bother myself about the gossip of the Puerta——" He marched off, with his head in the air.

"Good-night," said Malleson, taking the key from the seréno, who had approached.

"Good-night," Felix echoed, his voice coming already faintly out of the darkness, for he walked off at a great pace, leaving his friend and mentor to ponder in solitude over this new and quickly developed humour. Nothing that Felix did or could do surprised the older man much. He was used to his lavish display of emotion, to his fancies and his likings, all of them hot, and few of them lasting.

There had been other fevers through which he had nursed the boy patiently, half amused, half scornful over his quick convalescence; yet he had, somehow, expected this attack to take

powerful hold, and to prove more troublesome. It did not disappoint him to find himself mistaken, if that was the reading to put on the young fellow's petulance. The love that was to raise, to steady, to make a man of him, was not in Philippa's gift. Malleson, in his blindness, always pictured a distant future, out of which some noble, unknown lady was to step, who should have the making of his young cousin in her hands. He never dreamed of possible pain to himself; of any call to self-sacrifice in the matter.

Meanwhile, on this, the night of his return to Madrid, he held that he had wasted time enough on so frivolous a subject; and, having tossed the contents of his portmanteau into a drawer and piled his papers on the table, he seized on a novel, drew his ancient armchair to the fire, and, with a shrug, dismissed Felix from his mind.

Nevertheless, his remark remained true. Everybody looked for but one result from Felix's championship.

When the rumour, somewhat distorted [illegible] garbled, reached the two ladies in their lonely home in the north of the city, there was much eloquence and a great deal of bitterness expended on the affair. Miss Barbara admired the spirit that was worthy of a Gordon, but

hated that it should be manifested on behalf of so unworthy a subject. She condemned Philippa, in spite of the girl's pretty apologies and protests; her pouts and her smiles, and even Di's pleadings had won her at the best but a cold tolerance. Other things might be forgiven her, but that she should win or be about to win, Felix, who might have aspired to the hand of a Gordon, was not to be forgiven her. Miss Barbara had cherished other schemes for her favourite, and the failure of these was visited also on Philippa.

Mr. Ouvry listened to the buzz of the cafés with smiling, contemptuous blandness. It was folly, but young men were foolish and rash. He crossed one white hand over the other. If this were to be the termination of Mrs. Henshaw's little troubles, it was well; specially well that she should escape them by other aid than his. He paid her a little visit, perhaps of congratulation. He spoke playfully of himself as a poor man—a very poor man; a man for whom wealth had no charms; but he hinted delicately that when good fortune fell at the feet of his friends he was the first to rejoice.

Mrs. Henshaw, without directly responding, received him graciously. Her plan had succeeded with less pain to her than she had dreaded, and she had bloomed out again into

the handsome matron of former days. She let Philippa arrange her hair in the most becoming fashion, and adorn it with delicate lace. She ordered Blake to hide the limp gown and severe head-dress out of sight; she wished no reminder of her past humiliation.

So, when Mr. Ouvry paid that timely visit, there was restored pleasantness in the gilded salon. The hostess moved and spoke once more like a woman who understands what is expected of her, and knows how to be agreeable. Mr. Ouvry liked agreeable people. He liked the rich rustle of her dress, the faint odour of perfume as she moved, the tone of renewed comfort in her voice. He sank into the easiest chair, and accepted the cup of tea that was offered; he listened very complacently, as she skimmed airily over the surface of things, touching no longer on disturbing topics. He forgave her silliness. Women were meant to please and not to instruct; and how much better and wiser was this behaviour than tears and protests! He was not going to be indiscreet or to pry, but he let her know, in the most delicate manner, that she had his sympathy and approval.

"Ah, yes," she answered, not quite able to forget that he had shown little eagerness to sympathize before, "if Philippa is happy, I can forget all I have suffered at the hands of others.

Injuries to myself I never found it difficult to pardon."

"Your charity does you infinite credit," he said, bent on being pleasant.

"And there is your daughter," she continued, anxious to show him to what a height of magnanimity she could rise. "She must come oftener; we must see more of her. I bear her no grudge; and I have brought Philippa up in ignorance of everything. I have always held that one's children should know nothing of old family quarrels."

"Very right; most creditable," he murmured again.

"Of course, she can't help being Mary's daughter; but I trust I am too just to blame her for that; and, after I have settled my dear Philippa, I am quite willing to extend my help to her. Oh, we ladies can do a great deal. A little bird has whispered a charming plan to me," she nodded mysteriously.

"I am sure my child would thank you," he said mildly, "for any kindness you may wish to show her; but, as for plans"—he shrugged his shoulders slightly—"she is but a child, a little girl of eighteen."

"Oh, girls of eighteen have their secrets and plans, too," she retorted archly.

"Very likely; but, as for myself, I may seem

to you very remiss, very lacking in foresight, but I really have no intentions for my little Di."

"You want some help, you see. Of course, there are few so attractive as my Philippa; but Deonys, with a little dressing, would really be quite pretty and presentable. We shall see, we shall see. I promise nothing, and my own dear child must come first, as is but natural."

"Ah," said Mr. Ouvry, smiling sadly, "you mothers can always keep your daughters; marriage does not separate you; but with us, when the lover steps in, the father is forgotten. No, no. I am in no haste to part with my little Di."

He spoke truly. Love for her was the strongest emotion his nature was capable of. It was not of the high or heroic order, but it was true so far as it went. He did not want to lose her—at least, not yet. A time might come when it would be well to think of these things, but it had not yet come. Still, Mrs. Henshaw's conduct had pleased him, and he marked his approval of it by saying carelessly to Di that same evening—

"My child, you must be a little more attentive to our friend downstairs, eh?"

"Philippa comes here," Di answered quickly.

"But you don't go there?"

"Do you want me to go, padre?"

"There is Mrs. Henshaw; we must try to make things a little pleasant for her."

"Do you want to invite her to lunch again?" she asked, with the remembrance of that hateful meal she had shared strong upon her.

"You can do that, if you like; but all I meant to suggest was, that you might run down oftener, and spend an hour with her in the evening. It is good for you, and my affairs take me so much away from you."

"Very well, padre. Of course, if you wish it," she answered reluctantly; "but I am never dull."

She did not give any reason for her reluctance, and her father did not ask one. Philippa, too, seemed hardly to notice that she came less often. Philippa was once more all smiles and sunshine, as full of merry talk and affectionate ways, that were hard to resist, as if Deonys had never had a glimpse into the shadowy side of her life. She had buried her trouble, and expected others to walk serenely as she did over its grave.

Perhaps, of all the little circle of people compelled to think urgently of her and her affairs, Felix Chester and Deonys Ouvry alone failed to fall completely under the old charm. Each knew too much. For each the first moment of disenchantment had arrived.

Di, troubled and burdened by her doubts, said to herself a hundred times a day—

"It was he who paid the money, and now he will marry her; and it was I who put the thought into their minds."

This foolish fancy haunted her. Had she done him good or ill by her impulsive words? She looked at him wistfully every time they met, trying to read his heart. She hoped, and yet she feared; she had lost her old tranquillity.

As for Felix, in spite of his anger at Ralph's prophecy, he went as often as ever to Mrs. Henshaw's drawing-room. Perhaps he forced himself to go more frequently, because his feet would have preferred to climb higher: perhaps because he wished to overlay with many new experiences, and to banish from his own memory and from hers the recollection of that interview to which Mrs. Henshaw had summoned him. Philippa had not been present. He caught himself often wondering if she knew anything about it; if she did, she showed no sign. She treated him with the old open and confiding friendliness. She made not the remotest allusion to their late visitor; never thanked him for his championship by a single look; told him, indeed, by every tone of her voice and turn of her head, that she wished to bury that episode out of sight.

But the young man could not obey, or, at least, not at once. He had learned so much within these days which he could not forget; so much had happened that he was forced to remember. Those blue eyes of his, so frank and open in their gaze, were graver now when they rested on her; they had a way of falling sometimes before her merry looks. He had been so near, so very near to love; and now? He looked at her strangely, as if she were a dear friend who had died. Was she the same Philippa whom he had been so eager to defend? Prince Alasnam, if you please, imagined he had found the perfect lady; but, when he looked in his mirror, behold the beautiful face was blurred and dim.

Mrs. Henshaw was nervously eager in her friendliness, and he met all her advances gently, very gently. One might say that the young man was growing suddenly older, and losing something of the boy.

As often as he could, he would go upstairs when Mr. Ouvry was at home, and listen to that gentleman's bland discourse. He proved a capital listener. For the most part, Di sat near the window, sewing by the light of her own little lamp, more diligent now than before. Felix played with her birds, teased them, wakened them, and made them tumble off their

perches; sometimes he looked at her, but they spoke little to each other.

But time goes on, and the troubles of heart and mind grow less, and love and friendship are not the only interests of life.

December came—the December of sharper airs and a sky of more full-toned blue. There were hints of coming festivity in the crowded streets, and flocks of unhappy turkeys were driven into the city, and gorged by relentless hands. Felix, in his wanderings through the streets often watched the process with laughter—the melancholy bird pinioned between the knees of an old woman seated on a doorstep: such an old woman as one only sees in Spain, yellow as parchment, and with lustrous, wicked black eyes. She holds the beak open with one hand, and with the other pops the pellets of food down the reluctant throat; while the brown-skinned children dance about her, and clap their hands as the plateful disappears.

While the Plaza Major, where once the fires of the Inquisition were lighted, was being made ready for milder Christmas merriment, there came one of those sudden scares for which the capital of this country is famous.

Mrs. Henshaw woke one morning to find she had narrowly missed a great opportunity. To have been besieged, barricaded, blockaded; who

would not have chosen the discomfort for the sake of the fame? When Ralph Malleson ran up to assure the ladies that there was no cause for alarm, he found the elder one writing a long account of it all to a correspondent in London. Miss Piper had flown down trembling to the shelter of the Preciados; Miss Barbara, who was also present, cast at her grim looks of disapproval, and almost scorn. Philippa was dramatically, and with secret glee, detailing all the particulars—militia called out; windows of all the public buildings bristling with guns; three policemen shot; barricades erected at the Toledo gate; grim determination on the part of the authorities to defend the capital at all hazards.

"You believe it all, I suppose?" said Ralph, glancing at her, and then looking across at Di, who sat a little apart, with a smile.

"Wicked man!" Philippa shook her head at him. "Don't tell us we haven't been in danger!"

"The danger would be about equal if you were in London."

"You destroy all the romance. There were risings in several places at once. What do you think of that? And but for a little misunderstanding and want of concentration——"

"Fortunately, as it happens, there is always

a little want of concentration; you may safely count on it."

Miss Barbara contested that there was danger; but that it ill became one who bore the name of Gordon to be afraid. Had not the Gordons been foremost in every deed of valour since the Crusades?

"They will kill the queen," said Di, from her corner, interrupting a panegyric on the clan.

Miss Piper recalled the flight of Isabella, and trembled.

Mrs. Henshaw looked up absorbed from her paper.

"How the Baird-Browns will envy us, Philippa!" she cried. "It is like living in the middle of history, you know, instead of reading musty dates. What a mercy it was, my child, you didn't go out to buy the flowers you spoke of! How can one think of new caps in times like these! They might have shot you. I shudder to think of it."

"Do I look like a dangerous conspirator?" said Philippa, arching her brows, and smiling on them all.

Then Mr. Malleson was discovered by the lady at her desk.

"Do come here, you dear good man," she said, "and tell me all you know. Are things quiet again? Are the rioters subdued? Have

the authorities prevailed, or is there more danger?" Her pen hovered eagerly over the paper.

Malleson went over to her, and did his best to satisfy her thirst for horrors. He drew an alarming picture; he was as sensational as a young reporter on his trial. The lady's fears were working. Her pen was rapidly recording his grave sentences. Miss Piper had drawn near, and was listening with bated breath.

Everybody started when the door suddenly opened. Miss Piper's hand went up to still the fluttering of her heart. The poor lady was crushed and dismayed by the severity of Miss Barbara's glances more than by all the flying rumours of disturbance.

It was only Blake, who entered with a note.

Philippa took it. "For you, mamma," she said, inquisitively examining the seal. "What an official-looking document!"

"If there is danger, it is the ambassador's duty to protect us as British subjects," said Mrs. Henshaw in a calm voice. "I know my privileges." She looked round at the company. "Philippa, do you remember how kind that delightful consul in Italy—no, in France—I forget his name, was to us?"

"Never mind him just now, mamma. Do put us out of suspense."

She broke the seal with careless dignity, while they all looked on with curious eyes. She read the communication slowly, then she let her arm drop, holding the sheet loosely in one hand. She looked round her, addressing them all.

"Of course, I know it is one's duty to disregard danger. I have always thought it a great want of breeding to show one's feelings too much—a calm restraint; and no Englishwoman can forget Brussels and Waterloo, though I always did pity the Duchess of —— dear me! I've forgotten her name. Such a sad spoiling of her ball."

"Mamma, mamma!" said Philippa impatiently, dancing up to her, "you keep us all in torture. Are we to be secretly assassinated, or put into a Black Hole, or what?" She peeped over her mother's shoulder, and glanced at the note. "Mrs. St. John!" she said wonderingly.

"I hope she doesn't mean to insult us by offering us American protection!" said Miss Barbara with indignant emphasis.

"An invitation," said Philippa, reading further. "A ball at the American minister's!" Her eyes sparkled. "Di, my child, the messenger must have taken a note upstairs for you. Isn't it splendid? Worth a dozen revolutions."

"A ball!" Miss Barbara rose with grim

looks. "This is no time for dancing, and such follies, when any moment we may be attacked in our own homes. But there's a lightness about some people you have little need to expect from their years and their grey heads. I'll be going home. There will be a card from that silly woman lying for me to answer. I'll let her know *my* opinion of such conduct, when folks would be better employed thinking seriously of their end."

Miss Piper, in spite of this gloomy view of matters, secretly hoped she might also find an invitation directed to herself, and the hope buoyed her up against Miss Barbara's depressing hints and allusions. She no longer proposed to accompany her friend, as she would formerly have done; she would almost rather have faced the rebels alone.

"There can't be any sin in a little social gathering—to keep up one's spirits?" she hinted wistfully.

"It is one's duty to go." Mrs. Henshaw gave a little sigh. "For my dear child's sake I must exert myself; and, I believe, I was never considered a coward. What a good thing we brought your pink silk, Philippa, and my lavender satin."

The talk having drifted from war and disaster into a more peaceful channel, interesting only

to feminine minds, Malleson, who had been an amused listener, rose to leave, but at a whispered word from Deonys, he crossed the room and offered to escort Miss Piper past the teeming dangers of the streets.

"Oh, thank you," she said, looking up at him with meek, grateful eyes, and clinging to his arm. "I am a little afraid; I dare say it is very silly—but not with you."

"I'll take good care of you," he said pleasantly.

She went over to kiss Di and whisper to her—

"My dear, I am not at all afraid—with him. Such a gentleman! He reminds me of my dear Robert—and so old a friend. And, you know, we can't all be Miss Barbara Gordons."

"Ralph is quite to be trusted," said Di with a smile; "and he will let me know how you got home."

As the two passed out, Major Gibbs was announced, and came in, large, well-preserved, and important, giving Miss Piper one finger to shake in passing, and honouring Ralph with a nod.

"I met that young fellow Chester just now," he said. "Wants to see some of the fun, he says. Poor fun, *I* tell him!"

"Oh, he's all right," said Malleson carelessly. "He'll look after himself."

"I came to protect the ladies," the major answered. "Women are always afraid. Call this a revolution—after India!" He stalked in with a contemptuous wave of the hand. He adjusted the glass in his eye, and while he was delivering his greeting, he spied out the note that had caused such a flutter in the breasts of all present.

"Ah, Mrs. St. John," he said. "Got mine last night—always secures me early. Fine woman that. Of course, you will go, ladies?"

"We thought of it, as an example, to show we are not afraid."

"And even if we don't enjoy ourselves, we shall be supported by a strong sense of duty," said Philippa, with dancing eyes.

"Of course you will go. They manage things very well at the Legation, but nothing to *us*, you know—nothing to *us*. Must get you introduced to our chief and his lady."

"It might be useful in case of danger," said Mrs. Henshaw, still thinking of the protection that was her due as a British subject.

"And in case of balls," said Philippa, smiling.

"I'll manage it. You trust to me," said the major loftily. "Nothing to be afraid of—nothing at all. Lady Louisa a particular friend of mine. I'll arrange it."

"And you will take us under your care?" said Philippa demurely. "You see, Major Gibbs, we are not used to such great people, and we might bow at the wrong place, or——"

"Philippa," her mother protested, "with your education and advantages——"

But the major was bowing gallantly.

"I'll take care of you; never fear. Nothing to be alarmed at. I'll coach you. I'll see you safe through it. Bless you, they are my dearest friends; there's nothing they wouldn't do for *me!*"

CHAPTER VI.

"Less of sentiment than sense had Katie."

At this time in far-off England the dull November sky brooded sullen and revengeful over London.

It was raining, and the wind was high; the anger of the heavens was poured out on the patient and unresisting earth, and men's hearts were heavy within them. Perhaps in no quarter did the day seem more dreary than in the western suburb of Kensington, where the whirl and dance of the passive leaves, and the shrill whistle of the wind, that shook the few still clinging to the naked branches, emphasized the gloom. Kensington pays dear for its summer beauty by its autumn sadness.

In a house that looked remotely and with a sidelong glance into the Gardens, a lady sat at work. The drawing-room window commanded a group of tossing trees, swayed this way and that at the will of the wind, yielding reluctantly at every blast a last sere and rustling dole.

The lady, who was thin and elderly, and who was dressed with a certain neat and sprightly care, looked up now and again to shake her head and give a little sigh. The sigh was for Paris, the paradise of all Madame Lavoisier's dreams—Paris, where alone you can be always gay. Madame Lavoisier was a Scotchwoman by birth and French only by marriage. Yet she persuaded herself that the land of your adoption is your true Fatherland; the mere accident of having been born elsewhere ought not to be reckoned against you.

"I am French," she was wont to say, with true Gallic animation. "French to the tips of my fingers." They were long fingers, swift and neat, fingers that pleaded for her. "But for you, my child, would I linger in this climate—atrocious, farouche, barbaric!"

Miss Bell Fullarton, to whom this was addressed received this praise of France with a certain coldness. Madame Lavoisier had been her governess, and was now her companion and guardian, and she loved her well, but she did not love her love of Paris.

"You are a bad patriot," she would say severely, "the Scotch and the French have always been allies—a proud thing for France!—but as for Scotland, there is no country like it under the sun, and there are no people like

Scotch people. You must learn to love your country."

This fiercely loyal young person presently joined the lady, whose thoughts were lingering about the capital made beautiful by Baron Haussman and the third Napoleon. That was the Paris to live in, but even the Paris of the Commune would be better than no Paris.

Miss Bell wore a waterproof, buttoned closely and a small hat that suggested deerstalking and Highland moors. The face under the hat was comely, though the cheekbones were perhaps a trifle high for beauty; the upper lip too long (the young lady gloried in these evidences of her nationality), but the eyes were blue and straightforward, the mouth and chin firm, and the hair of that pale reddish gold that would redeem the plainest features.

"I am going out to walk," she said; "will you come?"

"I, my child!" Madame Lavoisier shivered. "It would kill me; and you—you will wet your feet."

"Wet my feet here—*here*," said Bell with scorn, glancing at her neat and serviceable boots, "where it does not even know how to rain properly! If I were going to cross Kylmure Moor you might talk—there would be some credit to be got out of one's boots, but here!"

"Here is bad enough, I think. If it were Paris, now—one has the best of everything in Paris. The sun shines there."

"And does it never rain there, and snow there, and does the east wind never blow there? I remember the last time——"

"Ah, the last time! Bell, you will not say anything against that beautiful, perfect time!"

Miss Bell's fair face flushed very slightly, the faintest access of colour under the little hat, and then she frowned.

"Oh, you silly woman!" she said. "If you want to be reminded of your Paris, go out to the High Street, and look at the shops. There is frivolity for you."

"Ah! the shops." Madame shook her head softly. "When I go it is but to pity the poor people, those who buy and those who sell; they have no sense of beauty or grace, these poor English, it is all solid, good, heavy."

"There I am at one with you," said Bell, buttoning her glove with neat dexterity; "only I'm not sure about the solidity or the goodness. I think, for my part, it's mostly sham. English people are so superficial, they never do anything thoroughly."

She said this with great severity. It was a favourite grievance. Madame Lavoisier had listened to it often, and with her French love

of the light handling of every topic, she a little dreaded it.

"About you going out alone," she remarked, by way of diversion; "it is a thing that troubles me. English misses do not go out walking alone."

"I am not an English miss," Bell answered with great scorn. "I am grateful to have been born in a country where one may retain a little independence. As for you going out with me, you know very well it is all nonsense. You never meant to do it."

"But for the atrocious climate——" Madame took another glance at the tossing trees.

"It's a poor little climate, only half in earnest, like everything else here," said Bell, her eyes following the same direction. "Think of the Kylmure Moor, with two or three feet of snow on it. The first big flakes fell there in the middle of October, and here, in the end of November, they lose heart before they get half way from the sky, and turn into this miserable mist."

Madame Lavoisier did think of Kylmure, and drew a little nearer the fire.

"Good-bye, you dreadful salamander," said Bell, marching to the door; "I'm going out to face these weak little elements, and you are going to roast yourself and dream of Paris."

Madame Lavoisier fell back into the chair, and certainly did as she was bid. She had a great hospitality for every memory of that gay centre of the world. She thought in French. She spoke the language with commendable purity, and, naturally, she thought in it with yet greater ease. She had taught Bell to have a certain fluency in her favourite tongue. She had been able, for instance, to take her share in the conversation during that last memorable flight across the channel, when they had had the benefit of Monsieur Adolphe's guidance; but Bell spoke French with a hopelessly acute Scotch accent. Madame sighed over this very often. It seemed to point to failure, to neglect on her part. Nothing would remedy it but a lengthened stay in the capital, and the benefit of constant conversation in the purest Parisian. When madame's mind reached this point, she always thought of a certain M. Adolphe, a youthful cousin of her late husband—a young man, bright-eyed, pigeon-breasted, with a carefully waxed moustache, and the finest manners and the best heart in the world.

Bell certainly wasted no thoughts on this Parisian exquisite as she went with firm, rapid step towards Hammersmith. She had a great many more important things to do. She had, for instance, the whole of England, or, at least,

the whole of London, to reform and reorganize; and that was mission enough, surely, for the most zealous apostle. Everything she saw was wrong, and she burned to set it in order. She had an immense appetite for helpfulness. Naturally her attention was first given to the girls of her own age: she had made a great study of English girls, and she had weighed them and found them wanting. The few whom she met went hurrying through the storm, pale-faced and shivering, struggling weakly to hold up umbrellas, and to gather the folds of flimsy waterproofs over their flounces, blown about as helplessly as the whirling leaves.

Bell, her cheeks glowing, the raindrops shining on her bright hair, her step free and elastic, despising the wind as a very feeble enemy indeed, looked at them with a great deal of lofty compassion.

"They sit poking over the fire reading, or rather skimming over novels—I never knew an English girl who *read* a book—no wonder their cheeks are white! They are as afraid of cold as if it were a wild animal about to devour them; they seem to dread that they will melt under the merest shower." This was something of what she told herself. She longed to take each one she met by the arm and to say to her

"Come and walk with me to Kew Gardens; it's not much of a walk, but it's all one can manage in this poor, flat country of yours. I'll engage to send you home with an appetite for dinner. You won't stuff yourself at the pastry-cooks, and declare that the sight of roast beef makes you ill after that."

"If there were any sensible people to join in it, I would get up a dress society," she went on with her soliloquy. "Nobody should be allowed to wear any boots but McMurdoch's; he has some idea of following the line of the foot, and doesn't pinch your toes into a shapeless mass. And we should get all the homespun for dresses manufactured for ourselves. But first one would need to remake the people." She shook her head. "That would be a harder task than to remodel their gowns."

As she went on, leaving Hammersmith, its narrow streets, bridges, crowded houses behind, she saw many other things that gave her food for adverse criticism.

If the boots of the girls displeased her by their texture and shape, the inadequately clothed feet of the little children of the poorer orders called forth much disapproval. Bell considered these shabby shoes and stockings a sinful waste of money, as well as a lasting injustice to the wearers. She thought of the bare limbs and

uncovered heads of her small Highland compatriots with proud superiority. Whoever heard of a Highland child taking cold or falling into consumption, she wondered, with sublime indifference to statistics.

Dwelling on the subject in this light, she suddenly remembered Miss Amelia Townsend. This young lady lived on the outskirts of Hammersmith, and had lately written two notes to Bell, to announce that she had a bad cold, and to describe her symptoms and sensations with some minuteness. Bell, it is to be confessed, read these effusions with a trifle of contempt—this anxious analysis of their sufferings was one of the little failings of her English sisters for which she found but scant sympathy; yet the next day she had walked across half London to find some particular remedy in which she had faith, and had sent it to Miss Townsend with characteristic instructions. Now she determined to go and see whether her patient had proved obedient.

Bell's face wore a decided "I told you so" look when she found Miss Townsend stretched on a sofa before a large fire, curtains and doors all carefully closed, and an array of little medicine bottles on a table near her.

"How good of you to come and see me." The invalid held out a languid hand.

"How are you?"

"Not well—far from well." She began to give an account of her sensations.

Bell walked round the end of the sofa and inspected the bottles, reading the labels gravely.

"See how hard it is to cure me," said Miss Townsend, watching her.

"To kill you, I should say."

"Your stuff is there, too, Bell; but I haven't got so far yet. And I got your note, too," she smiled.

"I might as well not have written it, I see," said Bell gravely, ending her survey and taking up her station as far as possible from the fire.

"Oh, Bell, dear, but I couldn't go out and walk, you know, in such weather, and with the doctor telling me I must take such care."

"I believe that doctor must have a great weight on his conscience," said Bell impressively, "if he has any conscience left. He is saying what he thinks you will like best."

"He says I have a very delicate constitution," said Miss Townsend, unwilling to part with this interesting possession. "And really, dear, don't you think he ought to know best?"

"Oh, I could tell you that, too," said Bell calmly. "If he had told you you were doing your best to have no constitution at all, he would only have been speaking the truth."

"And yet you urge me to go out!

"It would make even me delicate to live here," said Bell, unfastening her waterproof. "I feel tired already in this atmosphere; and, as for you, the life is just oozing out of you."

"Oh, I am not really very ill," said the invalid, hardly caring to follow her symptoms quite so far; "only needing a little care."

"I'll tell you what you need. You want a cold plunge bath every morning, and a six-mile walk after it, and no more late hours or dancing in hot rooms and eating indigestible suppers. I'll undertake to cure you and give you a new constitution in six weeks."

"Ah! but I am not a Spartan like you. You must give me up, Bell; you must confine your hopes to your own countrywomen, unless they are all as brave as you."

"I don't think I'm particularly brave.'

"You are afraid of nothing."

"I don't know. I haven't tried everything yet. I dare say I might be a coward in some matters."

"Not brave to come out all this way, on a day like this?"

"That needs no courage; it's pleasure. What I should need courage for would be to endure your life for a day.

Miss Townsend laughed.

"I'm afraid we couldn't exchange places. I'm sorry I'm such a disappointment to you, Bell. Haven't you any Scotch friends or cousins—you are all cousins, aren't you?—to sympathize with you?"

"I have only one cousin, and she is half Spanish. I don't know very much about her, but I dare say she has been brought up in a very silly way."

"That is comforting. I think I should like that cousin of yours."

"I have never seen her. Amelia, I must go. I do you no good, and I am dreadfully uncomfortable in this hot room."

"Yes, go. You remind me of a wild bird shut up in a cage, Bell. I wish I had your strength and, though you won't let me say it, your boldness. But I am content with my cage. I'll send you a little note to tell you how I feel, to-morrow."

"If you would send me a note to say you would walk over to lunch, I should like that much better. I should take care that there was nothing to disagree with you."

"The cure would be worse than the disease," said Miss Townsend, laughing. "Bell, my dear, you must give me up; I am hopelessly English."

"I know. You can't help it, I suppose."

"I'm afraid not. I advise you to adopt the Spanish cousin," Miss Townsend retorted as Bell said good-bye.

She took her departure with the greater speed because she had received a new inspiration, and when this energetic young lady became possessed of an idea, she was immediately impatient to examine it alone.

On her way home, criticism was content to remain dormant. If there were young persons who were rash enough to clothe their feet in flimsy kid, Bell had no eyes for them. The children with shoes and stockings passed unchallenged; the thriftless and the shiftless Southern ways for once escaped rebuke. She was reckoning with herself instead. She had a lively and workable conscientiousness, and was as prompt to exact any duty of herself as she was to insist on its fulfilment by others. And she had become aware of a neglected duty.

The storm had increased in force, but she never felt it. She walked with a free, resolute step and upright carriage, her head erect, her blue eyes absent and thoughtful, rather than keenly observant as usual. There was a certain charm, for those who had power to see it, in this independent, erect, almost defiant figure—this girl, who was taking herself to task with almost laughable earnestness.

"Amelia Townsend was quite right," she was assailing herself; "I had no business to go and lecture her, when all the time I have been neglecting my nearest obligation. That poor child is my only cousin, and what have I ever tried to do for her? Nothing but write to her twice a year."

The ghosts of those old letters seemed to rise in the misty, rain-washed road, and to reproach her. Bell remembered vagrant sentences from them here and there, and she was ashamed to remember them. She might have made them so much more sensible and urgent and impressive. She thought of all the sentiments with which she might have overwhelmed and dismayed poor Di, and she was angry with herself.

When she reached home she walked straight to the drawing-room, where, soothed by the gathering darkness and her dreams of France, Madame Lavoisier had fallen into a gentle slumber. She started as the door [illegible]kly opened, and instinctively put up her hand to arrange the lace upon her head.

"Bell, my child, it is you? Are you drowned—half dead?"

"I am very well," said Bell, kneeling down on the fender-stool, and lifting up a fresh, rosy cheek to be kissed. She did not care much for kis[illegible] but madame did; and Bell liked to

indulge people's fancies, except in the matter of clothing and food and the general conduct of life. "You ought to have been out. Don't you know it is very bad for you to sleep in the day?"

She lifted the great, ornamental, shining poker as she spoke, and broke the lumps of coal into fragments. She never used the serviceable little "curate," on the principle of not encouraging shams. The vexation of the housemaid's soul was not to be taken into account where a great principle was concerned.

The flames leaped up, and showed a very earnest young face, the raindrops still sparkling on the bright hair.

"I have an idea," said Bell, addressing herself to the red glow.

"Ah!" said madame, clasping her hands dramatically, "you are going to leave this dreadful, barbarous England; you are going to listen to my prayers."

"I have thought of that, too," she answered, with a demure smile. "I have sometimes thought that we might give up the house——"

"And go to Paris!" Madame's action became lively.

"The winters in Kylmure are glorious! It's a pity to lose them all. I long to see real, clean, respectable snow again."

Her companion sank back with an expressive shiver.

"But in the meantime," Bell continued, "we can do nothing. We have this house till spring. I have been thinking a great deal this afternoon about my cousin, Deonys Ouvry."

"You would go to Spain?" Madame began to revive a little.

Once away from this dreary England, and all things were possible. Visions of M. Adolphe and the sunny boulevards floated before her eyes.

"No," said Bell, shattering this dream ruthlessly, "I shall ask her to come here. She is my only cousin; I have neglected her shamefully. I hope she is not silly, like her name; but, whatever she is, I ought to do something for her. I dare say she has never had any one to tell her things, living alone with my uncle. She has had a great deal against her. I should like very much to do something for her."

There was a great deal of kindness in the blue eyes, and her heart was warming towards the young cousin for whom so much might be done.

"Fortunately, there has been no such great loss of time," she went on, as she met with no interruption. "She is a mere child, I believe—a child, that is, to me. No doubt she will consider me very old."

"A charming woman is never old," said madame, not quite certain how much she liked this plan, and meeting it with a general remark.

"That's a very pretty compliment," said Bell, with a laugh; "but it doesn't take away a single day from my twenty-six years. But you know I don't like to be thought young. It would be much nicer if Deonys would look on me as a grown-up friend; I could do her more good."

"And you think she will come?"

Madame privately wondered whether the young stranger would show much alacrity in accepting the invitation. To be done good to is not what one thinks of first when one is eighteen.

"I hope so," said Bell soberly. "I will write to her very urgently. And we must be very kind to her. I have a fancy that she is gentle and a little, just a very little, silly, perhaps; but she is young," said this person of exalted age; "and I do want to be very fond of her."

"You will write to her?"

"Oh, yes; at once. It is only a week or two before my usual time. I dare say she won't be able to come before spring; but I'll write and get the thing settled at once."

"But you will take off this first?" said

madame, with her fine smile, touching the wet cloak with a dainty finger.

Bell started up.

"To be sure! I'm breaking one of my own rules. Never mind; you know I never catch cold."

CHAPTER VII.

"Her gown should be of goodliness, well ribbon'd with renown;
Purfill'd with pleasure in ilk place, furrit with fine fashioun."

THE letter was duly written, and went upon its way, and in course of time fell into Di's hands. She received it with very mingled feelings. Letters from England were rare. Her father had long ceased to have any connection with that country, and Di's one correspondent had never given her any particular pleasure.

Her cousin's tone, though kind, had always made her feel as if she were very ignorant and unambitious, and quite absurdly contented with her surroundings. This time the half yearly missive had come before it was due, and Di felt that it was hardly fair to make her uncomfortable a whole month too soon. Then it flung the burden of debt upon her shoulders, and the answering of Bell's letters was, as she had confided to Felix, a task that had no comfort in it.

So it has to be confessed that she examined the address, written with neat preciseness, and the various postmarks, and contented herself for the moment with that inspection. She slipped the envelope unopened into her pocket till a less busy hour.

For she was living in stirring times. There was, for one thing, Mrs. St. John's ball at the American Legation, about which everybody was talking. Deonys had duly received a card for herself. It was the first invitation of the kind she had ever received, and she looked at it curiously. She was rather proud of it. It triumphantly proved that she was grown up; it was as good as a certificate of age, and was very soothing after Bell's uncomfortable way of pointing out how young she was. But she never for a moment meant to accept it. She disliked and mistrusted Mrs. St. John, and she felt it would be a sort of treason to partake of her hospitality, and to pretend to be grateful for it. Besides, the thought of a ball had more of terror than of fascination for her. She had never learnt to dance; it would be melancholy to sit still; but it would be more than melancholy to attempt and to fail. Then she would have to talk French. She knew that people of many nationalities attended these assemblies, and that all the pretty things and all the polite things

were uttered by these very refined people in the court language of the world. She had, besides, no dress; she could not go in a white frock, that had grown too short at the sleeves. So, on all these very important grounds, she made up her mind to decline.

"What am I to say, padre?" she asked. showing her father the dainty card when he came to her in the evening. "It is my very first invitation, and I want to refuse it in the finest and most correct words. It feels very grand to say no."

"But why should you say no?" he asked, examining the card with some intentness.

"Oh, I meant only for myself; here's another for you. I've got to do my refusing on my own account. That makes it very responsible."

"But why refuse at all?" said her father again. "As for me, such things are not much in my way; but you—you are just at the age for pleasures."

"I'm too young," said Di, laughing, "or too old. I think I must have missed over the bit of me that was meant for balls. I don't want to go, padre."

"You can't tell how you will like it till you try."

"I don't think I want to try."

"Ah! youth, youth!" said Mr. Ouvry, with a

melancholy smile, "don't be in haste to relinquish your legitimate pleasures, my child. Age will come and hard experiences all too soon."

"Let me stay at home with you," said Deonys, to whom this vapouring, sentimental fashion of speech was always sacred, touching her quickly by its hint at past sorrows. "Let me stay at home with you, dear old padre."

Mr. Ouvry put an arm round her waist, and let her lean her head on his shoulder; but he allowed himself to look rather vaguely out of the window.

"Do you know what everybody will say, Di? They will say that I am the stern father so commonly represented in fiction, and you the unfortunate princess, whom I have confined in a tower. It is always a tower, I think."

"It doesn't matter what people say," said Di, who disliked to rule her actions on this principle, "so long as it isn't true, and it is all nonsense."

"And there are other grounds," he continued gently. "We must not be selfish; we must not think only of ourselves; we must sacrifice ourselves sometimes, if it is to give pleasure to others."

"Do you think the St. Johns [illegible] us so much?"

"They have paid you the compliment of asking you."

"Of course, I know they want you," she said, speaking from sincere conviction; "but me?"

"Suppose I should want you?"

"You can have me at home always."

She did not mean to reproach him, as he knew very well; but her gentle opposition stimulated him to carry his point. He had not cared much about it before; but to disagree with this bland gentleman was never the way to gain your end. He began to think again that Deonys was a little selfish.

"I don't ask many things of you. I am not very exacting, I think," he said mildly, "not perhaps altogether the fierce father of novels we were talking of a moment ago—eh, Di? and it grieves me, my child, to see you thinking only of your own pleasure."

"Of course, I will go if you wish it," she answered quickly. She was a little shocked to be again charged with selfishness.

"I do wish it, my dear."

"Then it is settled." She drew herself a trifle away, and looked at him. "But you will find me a dreadful trouble. Going to balls is like being married; you never have anything to put on. One would think you had gone without clothes all your life before."

"So you do know something about balls?

Where did you gather all this ripe experience?"
He smiled at her with mild indulgence.

"Oh, I know. You will have to give me a dress, padre, and slippers and gloves, and I don't know all what."

"And we shall be ruined, eh? Well, well, that can be managed, too, I dare say—that little matter of a toilet. And we must choose something of the best, something very good indeed. You will get your friend to help you."

"Oh, yes, Philippa will help me," she answered. She had perfect confidence in Philippa's taste in costume; but very little in her own power to wear her finery successfully.

"The emancipated princess must look like a princess. You are growing up, Di; you are no longer a child."

"No; and if you make me go to balls, you will find that I am very grown-up indeed! If I come out of my shell, I'll never be able to go back – never; and I'll cost a great deal more."

He did not heed her playful words; he was looking at her with some intentness. She seemed to have suddenly sprang up into womanhood before his eyes, into slender and graceful maidenhood. He remembered Mrs. Henshaw's words, he had remembered them throughout all this discussion; they had to a certain degree influenced him. A month ago he would have

said that Di was a child. She might then have refused a dozen invitations with his entire approbation, but now it seemed to him she was no longer the little girl he had chosen to think her; she was growing womanly, and her face, with its serene, clear eyes, was very fair. Mrs. Henshaw had hinted that Di was pretty, but her father knew that she was a great deal more than that. He did not want the lady's offered help; he did not want to lose his daughter—at present. He was very fond of her. But he could imagine a time when she should have to relinquish this early youth and charm, and when he himself might possibly have developed a few more likings and desires. One could never tell what might happen. In the meantime, it seemed a pity to stand aloof and to let all the prizes fall into the lap of another.

Of all these vague, half-formed thoughts he said not a word aloud, but he continued to look at his daughter closely and with growing content.

"You are like me—like what I used to be as a young man," he said suddenly.

"Am I?" She looked surprised. She was about to have said, "I thought I was like mamma, only not pretty," but she checked herself.

"It is very nice of you to say that, padre, but I don't think I have a neat straight nose

like you, mine curls up a little at the end; it is a nose of good intentions, it begins well, but it fails half way."

She was thinking all the while, "It's a good thing I don't add to his trouble by reminding him of mamma."

He laughed a little, and kissed her lightly on the forehead.

"Wait till you see the waking princess," he said. He, too, was thinking, "she is not like her mother," and the thought gave him great satisfaction.

So the difficult question of the ball was settled; and, as usual, it had been found possible to count safely on Di's sweet temper. She did not like the prospect of ending her chrysalis stage and turning into a gay butterfly, but she had given her promise, and there was an end of it.

She presently discovered that she was to have a great many companions. Mrs. Henshaw had declared it to be a sacred obligation to go—to show that, as a British subject, you were above the paltry fears that agitated the breasts of others--and she hoped she was equal to whatever was expected of her. Miss Barbara, who pronounced it no time for fooling when you might be robbed at any moment of your family plate or your life, announced, to everybody's sur-

prise, that she meant to be present to look after Deonys.

"I knew her mother," she said majestically, to all who cared to listen. "I would expect to be haunted by her ghost if I didn't do my duty by that child as if she was my own. I never was the one to shrink from what's right, and, though my *moire's* not just the newest fashion, I'd like to know if that's to hinder me sheltering a poor motherless bairn, when she goes into temptation!"

Di smiled, but she thanked her old friend. She was not afraid of Miss Barbara's large *moire antique* presence being any restraint on her, as Philippa hinted; she thought of it rather as a comfortable shield and defence.

The two girls drew together in renewed friendship over this great prospect. It was a relief to have some new ground to stand upon, some neutral meeting-point where past differences might be lost sight of. In matters of taste Philippa reigned supreme, and it was pretty to witness her eager anxiety that Deonys should outshine everybody else, and beam forth a veritable princess.

Mr. Ouvry had been indulgent in the matter of a cheque, and shopping became the absorbing occupation of the day.

Felix found no one but Mrs. Henshaw at

home when he called. He was a little absent in his manner at this time, and listened with a divided mind to the lady's talk, though it seemed to him afterwards that she had said a great deal, and had been more than ordinarily confidential. Formerly, he had extracted much private fun out of her little collection of sentiments, but now his feeling for her was more a kind of pity. He took infinite pains to be kind and courteous, but he was amused no longer; and she, though she talked with great seeming frankness, was never quite at her ease with this changed and silent young man. He knew too much; strive as she might, she could never forget that, and there were hours when she almost hated him for it.

She mentioned that Philippa had gone out shopping with Miss Ouvry, and even named the street where they were probably to be found, but Felix did not go in search of them; he went instead for a walk. He took at this time long solitary stretches across the bare country, on foot or on horseback, "in search of backgrounds," as he told Ralph, who professed surprise at this new freak.

So, while he was walking with steady, swinging steps towards Caravanchel, the two girls were left in undisturbed possession of the counter at the shop of the Blue Dahlia. This affair of

choosing was a very serious one, and never more serious than in Spain, where the Eastern habit of bargaining lingers. Di conducted the enterprise with much skill; Philippa chose the stuffs to be examined, but she held the purse-strings. The young man behind the counter found occasion for much dramatic action, shrugging of the shoulders, beating of the breast, cries that the señoras were about to ruin him. He addressed them orientally and familiarly as "my daughters;" he relinquished a peseta with a gesture of profound melancholy; he patted, praised, and caressed his wares as if no price could be too large for such splendid fabrics. And through it all Di sat with that air of knowing all about it, and of biding her moment that was truly diplomatic.

There was, for some time before the girls were aware of it, an amused spectator of this little scene.

Ralph Malleson had also been calling at the Preciados. He had sat for half an hour in the gilded salon, and had been more inclined than Felix to gather information.

Philippa was the first to discover him. She looked up and shook her head at him.

"We don't want you," she said softly; "we are engaged on an agitating affair. It needs the greatest prudence."

"So I see."

"You will spoil everything. I know what it is to go shopping with gentlemen: you have no tact, and you lose patience at once."

"I will be a model of patience—a male version of Griseldis," he said, coming forward. He leaned against the counter and looked on with amused eyes.

Di, glancing up, welcomed him with a pleased look; and the youth on the other side of the board, seeing this new ally join himself to the forces of the enemy, grew more dramatic, more despairing than before.

"It is very Eastern," said Philippa. "What mamma would call a page out of the past."

"Fight it out, Di," said Ralph encouragingly. "Don't give in."

"I mean to give him what is right," she answered, "the full price, but not twice what he ought to have."

"I'm afraid that insinuating youth would have found me an easy prey. Just look at him. One would think we were about to deprive him of his life as well as of all his property."

"That's the finishing stroke," said Malleson, glancing carelessly at the melancholy salesman, "the last act of the drama. Now the curtain will fall. They like to do things picturesquely here."

And he was right, for the next moment this melodramatic owner of the Blue Dahlia was cheerfully measuring off the yards, and folding up the parcel, with as much alacrity as if he had been the victor.

"So this is the raiment in which you are going forth to conquer," Ralph said, fingering the diaphanous stuff. "What doyou call it—muslin?"

"Oh, how wise you are," said Philippa lightly. "Do you suppose we should have wasted all this anxiety over muslin?"

"I thought white muslin was the proper armour for young ladies bent on slaughter. I could give you a dozen instances from the best fiction, beginning with Thackeray, of heroines who wore it."

"Perhaps you would like us to wear pinafores and bibs and blue sashes, too? This, sir, if I may correct you, is silk gauze."

"The stuff that butterflies are made of? Di, suppose you do a little bargaining for me, now?"

"But this is only a lady's shop."

"It is a lady I want to choose for. An aunt, let us say."

"But you have no aunt."

"Well, then, you most literal young woman, a lady who might be my aunt; or, suppose we

say, my grown-up sister. Now, what would any one, who had the honour of occupying that position, choose for herself, do you think?"

"We are to suppose her older than you?" Philippa asked.

"You are to suppose her a discreet and charming lady, with a great sympathy for my youth and immaturity."

"She must be very grown-up, indeed," said Di demurely.

"It means that she is elderly, not to say old," said Philippa thoughtfully; "though he puts it so politely. It must be something solid, then, and massive."

"Something of the very best."

"Is it a ball-dress?"

"A ball-dress, yes."

But Di, who had taken no part in the discussion at all, here asked the shopkeeper to bring forward some shining silks and satins, and was turning them over with very bright eyes and a happy smile.

"Wouldn't one of these do?" she said, looking up at him questioningly.

She pointed out a silvery grey and a deep, full-toned blue.

"The grey would be best; but she might like a little more colour. I am sure she likes bright things."

"How well you comprehend this mysterious lady's wishes, Di!" exclaimed Philippa.

"She has known me all her life, you see, and she understands the family taste," Ralph answered, looking at Di, with a smiling glance of secret understanding.

"Let it be the blue, by all means, if you think my——she would prefer it. You must add to your kindness by fixing on the quantity and the trimming, and all the rest of it."

"But one must know if she is tall or little. It makes a great difference."

"Oh, I can guess, I think," said Di joyfully. "I am so glad. I think this is the very nicest shopping I ever did."

It is needless to say that Ralph Malleson also thought it a very pleasant way of spending the afternoon, pleasanter, for instance, than instructing the British public, which ought to have been his task. He was in a royally generous mood, and would have been quite reckless but for Di's grave and almost motherly watchfulness. Yet, before they came out of that shop, they had made some most wonderful purchases; and the owner of the Blue Dahlia had changed his demeanour from pining melancholy to the most smiling joy. There was a head-dress with roses of the pale, faint pink that goes so well with grey hair; there were slippers, and a collar, and

even a laced handkerchief, and a bottle of delicate perfume. Nothing was forgotten, and this large package was paid for, and was ordered to be sent to the Preciados, where it was to be once more repacked, readdressed in a feigned hand, and sent on its further way by a porter, who was to be bribed to the most profound silence.

Di entered into all these details with glee.

"I am so glad," she said again; "and she will never guess who sends them."

"She must never guess. You must be very wily, and parry all her questions."

"Oh, she won't ask many; she is so simple. She will be content with wondering and being grateful."

"What a good nephew—I beg your pardon—brother you are," said Philippa. "Brothers generally like to take full credit for their good deeds, but you do yours in secret."

"Philippa, you mustn't betray him."

"I couldn't; I haven't the pleasure of knowing Mr. Malleson's—sister. But you won't forbid me to look for that blue gown and those pink roses at the ball?"

"Oh, you will know all about it before then. I want you to help me a great deal. But you mustn't whisper a single word of it to anybody."

"I will be as silent as the grave, as mamma would say. Wild horses won't drag it from me. I love mysteries."

This was a very innocent little mystery, Malleson thought, as he left them at their door, and yet he smiled to himself more than once as he thought of it. It was a well-spent hour, since it had brought such a light of happiness to the sweetest face in the world. It is to be feared he valued Di's pleasure more highly than that of the lady who was to be made rich by his gift.

If Philippa had failed to penetrate the small secret—which is improbable, seeing she was an acute young person—she was very speedily enlightened. Di waited two days in a state of pleasant impatience, and then she summoned her friend. A fluttering little note, full of exclamation points and dashes and underlined words, had come from Miss Piper.

"We must go to her. You will come, won't you? And you won't tell her, if you can help it, Philippa?"

"I'll go, and I will be a model of discretion."

"We mustn't say what isn't true," said Di, ever a stickler for uprightness. "But it won't be difficult to make her understand that she mustn't ask any questions."

"She will suppose she owes this gift to the generous impulse of a Piper. There are still Pipers left, are there not, or are they all done into miniatures?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps she is the last of her clan, like Miss Barbara. What shall we do in that case?"

"We must keep the secret somehow, Philippa——" She hesitated. "Do you think you could help to make the dress? You have such clever fingers, and she can't afford to have it made."

"But if she insists on a low body," she answered, with a rueful arching of her brows, "like the thin Miss Piper, with the small waist!"

"You know she won't."

"I'm not sure. Young people like to be smart."

"It would be a way of showing——" Di began gravely.

"Of showing I was sorry I got her into trouble—that I wished to make amends?" said Philippa quickly, with a little flush. "Oh, Di, you don't think I meant to hurt her? I'll make the dress with the greatest pleasure in the world."

"That will please her. Miss Barbara has never forgiven her."

"I'll make her do it yet."

Philippa stopped in the wide entrance, and, laying her hands on the other's shoulders, looked down earnestly and yet brightly.

"I can make people do what I like—generally."

"I know you can," said Di wistfully.

"Well, Miss Barbara shall make her peace with Miss Piper. Would that please you?"

"Very much. It is such a great thing to Miss Piper."

"Then I will make her do it. And now, don't you think you might kiss me, Di? Do you know, you haven't kissed me since—for a long time, and I have felt like a naughty child put in the corner."

Deonys put her arms up and drew the other face down to her own. In the mute caress there was an unspoken reconciliation, a tacit promise that the past should be forgotten.

Miss Piper, as Philippa had shrewdly guessed, did not discompose them with any perplexing conjectures. In the agitating hours since the parcel arrived, she had established a complete theory, and it was not for these young people to disturb it. She drew them in and shut the door with an air of mystery.

"A great thing has happened," she said, speaking in an eager undertone. "I sent for

you to tell you about it, Deonys. I have been recognized by my relatives."

"I am very glad," said Di, wondering at this beginning, but understanding that congratulations were expected of her.

"I may mention now," said the little lady, sighing softly, "that I felt their desertion. When dear Robert died, a little notice would have been very soothing. One expects it of one's relatives at a time like that. But my cousin was a poor man then, and he might have dreaded to presume. He was the first of the Pipers to go into trade, and perhaps he feared to intrude."

"And you have heard from him?"

"Not directly, my dear. He has taken a most delicate way, I must say, of recalling himself to me. Poor mamma would never consent to any advances on our part after Richard took to business, and I am afraid she would have been shocked at his boldness in coming forward again. She would have repulsed him; she was so dignified." She glanced doubtfully at the large lady represented in the painting. "But I have no dignity, I fear. Besides, he is my only cousin; and I believe that there is not the same objection now to trade that there was in mamma's day. I understand people in business are admitted into the most refined circles."

"Oh yes," said Philippa encouragingly. "You find them everywhere, even at court. Business is in fashion just now."

"Then you think I may accept his gift?" Miss Piper turned eagerly to Deonys. "He has sent me a most handsome present, and I may say, a most timely one. He is—ahem!—a silk merchant, so there is really something very delicate, you know, in the attention. But I want to do what is right." She glanced with longing eyes at the parcels spread out on the table for inspection. "And if it would not be dignified ——" She faltered.

"Dear Miss Piper," said Di earnestly, "you mustn't think of refusing it. The person who sent it meant it in all kindness and respect."

"You think it would hurt his feelings if I sent it back?"

"I can answer for it—it would," said Philippa, with dancing eyes. "He would feel dreadfully hurt."

"You think so? I dare say if dear mamma were living now she would think differently. One cannot hold out against the spirit of the age. I could never have accepted a present from any other person, but a cousin is different."

"I am sure it was sent out of the kindest motives," Di murmured again, in a great hurry to get the question settled.

"The worst of it is, I don't know his address. It came anonymously. That is what I call real refinement of feeling, but it makes it more difficult to thank him."

"The giver will not care to be thanked. He will understand."

"But that would be discourteous," said Miss Piper in gentle reproof. "I dare say if I write to London it will find him. I have no doubt the Pipers are still remembered there; we had an excellent position once."

She sighed a little over the ended past, but she brightened the next moment, for Philippa had untied the ribbon that held the satin together, and its lustrous folds fell sweeping to the floor.

"You will be magnificent!" she exclaimed. "There won't be a dress to equal this in the ball-room. I must say your—cousin has shown a charming taste." She looked across at Di with a mischievous smile.

"Blue was always said to be my colour." The little spinster beamed gently on them. "It was considerate of Richard to remember that. And this is not too gay. One should never be too gay."

"Oh, it is just right; it will look splendid. As for Miss Barbara's *moire*, it will be just here," said Philippa, with a little toss of her head.

"Miss Barbara will think it frivolous," said Miss Piper, once more a prey to doubt.

"Ah! but we can't all hope to please Miss Barbara." Philippa lifted her chin. "And why should we make frights of ourselves to keep her company?"

"She will say I have been too yielding. She would have repulsed poor Richard. She has so much firmness."

"I shouldn't repulse anybody who sent me a dress like this. As for Miss Barbara, you mustn't mind her; you know it is all my fault that she is cross," she said penitently, looking up into the old, kind face. She was kneeling on the floor, holding the long shining folds against Miss Piper's shabby skirts.

"Never mind, my dear." Miss Piper's tone was anxiously consoling. "She will forgive me some day, perhaps. I may have been imprudent, but you, at least, are safe. You sent him away?"

"Yes," said Philippa, in a low voice. "I sent him away, or he went away. At any rate, he is gone."

No one spoke for a moment, but in all three minds the thought of Felix, and the share he had taken in accelerating Mr. Ferryman's departure, was uppermost; but that was a subject Philippa preferred to ignore. She was the one to break the silence, saying impulsively

"If I was less—if I behaved less badly than I might have done, I have to thank you and Di for that."

Thus she sealed her atonement, and the next moment, with one of her quick changes, she was gaily discoursing on the subtleties of a toilet.

"You must let Di and me make the dress for you," she said. "We are two idle young women; it will be a charity to employ us. I've seen all Mrs. St. John's finery from Paris, and am steeped in the very latest fashions."

"I should like it nicely made." Miss Piper forgot her scruples under the spell of the topic. "It would only be right and just to my cousin Richard to have it well made."

"It's the very least you can do for Mr. Richard," said Philippa, with excellent gravity.

"What is your opinion, Deonys?"

"I think you may trust Philippa," Di answered, with a smile; "she is a born dress-maker."

"If I could be sure of being well fitted—not that I think lightly of your powers, my dear," she hastened to add; "but I am perhaps a little particular. I may not have the mind of my family—to that I do not pretend—but I ay say I have the bodily presence." She d her neat waist, and smoothed her shabby h a little gentle pride. "The Pipers

always had a charming taste in dress, as any one can see. Dear mamma was quite famous for her turbans, and my aunt Anne once had some lines addressed to her by a poet. They were called 'Stanzas on a Lady in a Red Satin Gown.' She had an elegant figure, and she always wore a low bodice."

To see the skill with which Philippa steered clear of these too fascinating examples, and the daring way in which she snipped and pinned and turned about the costly stuff, was a wonderful thing.

These were happy days that followed. Di forgot her fears—her little anxious tremors. Her doubts were slumbering. She abandoned herself to the passing hour. Life was once more very fair; it seemed to go by in tripping steps and to the sound of music.

Philippa and she sat together in the high window overlooking the hurrying fever of the life below, like two cloistered maidens peeping at an untried world. Philippa sung snatches of gay song while her fingers flew; but Di was often idle, looking at the passing pageant with sweet, serious eyes. It was December now, and the year was waning, but here in the south it dies royally, wearing to the end its splendour of sunshine and of brave blue skies.

CHAPTER VIII.

"This bud of love by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower."

On Christmas Day the great ceremony of a presentation at the British Embassy took place.

Major Gibbs had not been allowed to forget his proposal; and the arrangement of this delicate little business had afforded him a lively satisfaction. To guide, advise and instruct a pretty young lady and her equally handsome mother, was a pleasant occupation for a gallant gentleman who knew himself to be welcome, and for whom that slight refreshment already mentioned was always forthcoming. Philippa poured out the wine in the tall glasses, and listened to the almost paternal warnings with an air of the prettiest deference.

"It is so kind of you to help us," she said; "we might have made so many mistakes; and I suppose Lady Louisa is like the queen—she would not pardon mistakes?"

"You have nothing to fear, my dear young lady. Rely on me; I've prepared her ladyship. I've told her all about you, you know," the major answered reassuringly.

"How nice of you! Then she won't have anything to find out about us."

"Really, Philippa, one would think you had never met with people of distinction in your life," said Mrs. Henshaw, irritated at this too great simplicity; "and I have always striven that you should mix only with the best society."

"But this is such a very serious affair, mamma; a slip would be fatal. We must be on our very best behaviour; and how can I know what the etiquette of an embassy is? We never got higher than a consulate before. And if Major Gibbs will only keep us right——"

She looked at him with a smile, in which he read nothing of the fun that was lurking there. She was in good spirits again; she could take enjoyment out of very little things.

And so, after morning service in the chapel, the ladies were swept up the wide staircase by this impetuous military gentleman; Deonys, whom Philippa insisted should be of the party, came last. Through wide corridors they went where gilded lackeys stood looking at themselves furtively in the tall mirrors, and so into

the great audience chamber, where Lady Louisa held a sort of royal court. She was a plump, fair lady, with a pleasant smile and a gracious bearing, and she sat with her bonnet on, having just preceded them from the chapel.

"And that made it seem so homely and friendly, you know," Mrs. Henshaw afterwards explained. Indeed, there was nothing formidable in the visit, which was very brief, though Philippa found that her vivacity was somewhat thrown away on the Hon. Mr. Berry, who, if the truth must be told, looked preoccupied and a trifle bored.

A few smiles and guarded words from Lady Louisa, a growl or two from the ambassador, much pompous speech from the major, sweeping curtsies and exit the ladies.

"That is what I call a most affable woman," said Mrs. Henshaw confidentially, when they had received Major Gibbs's congratulations and had taken leave of him. "No pretence about her. She asked me your age, Philippa, and if you had come out."

"Mr. Berry didn't take such a friendly interest in me. He looked as if he thought I ought to have stayed in."

"Oh! since we are right with his lady it ·tters very little, though I dare say you were ken, child. I've known people with that

dry manner who did the oddest and most impulsive things; and you know it is she who will issue all the invitations."

"Unless he has an impulse to exclude us."

"I think I know when I make a good impression," said Mrs. Henshaw with loftiness of tone. "I take some trouble to please. I wish I could be always equally sure of your behaviour."

Di, who had said nothing at all, and who had made her curtsey but awkwardly she feared, was glad when they reached the Plaza Major, where a great fair was being held, and thus cut short this exchange of repartee.

There, wandering disconsolately among the lambs and kids and the too inquisitive turkeys, Felix was discovered and taken possession of.

"You ought to have been with us," said Philippa; "we have received our hall-mark, our patent of nobility."

"Where have you been?"

"At the Embassy. Lady Louisa is charming. She asked if I had come out. I hope you told her that I had made my *début*, mamma?"

"You may trust me to take care of your interests, Philippa," said her mamma in a stately voice. "It is a pity you did not go with us, Mr. Chester; if we had only thought of mentioning it to Major Gibbs——"

"Thanks; I've met Lady Louisa," he said carelessly. "I know some of her people at home."

"If we had known sooner we could have told her about you."

Mrs. Henshaw felt aggrieved. It would have been such a good subject of conversation; but this careless young man seemed to think Lady Louisa's no better than common people.

"Then you have called?" said Philippa. "She will put you on her list. I wish she would put me on it, too; I behaved beautifully. I deserve to be rewarded."

"I haven't called. I suppose I must, some day."

"If she asks you, won't you say I dance beautifully? It might occur to Mr. Berry that I had never been taught."

"If she asks me, yes." He smiled at her mischievous face.

They had lingered while they talked in a corner a little removed from the crowd, but now there was a sudden rush of people towards them, and they were separated. Felix found himself standing near Deonys, who had taken refuge behind one of the stalls.

"It is the procession of the Niño," she said, ...n her glance met his. "It will be gone in ...te."

"I don't care how long it takes," he said boldly, not manifesting any interest in the spectacle.

"But you ought to look at it."

"Ought I?" he laughed. Well, if it's a duty——"

He stood on tiptoe; but he could see nothing, save the shaven ivory crowns of the bareheaded Brotherhood, and he soon followed her to her shelter.

"They are taking food to make a feast for the poor people in the hospital. Can't you see the dishes they are carrying? It's something you ought not to miss."

"No," he answered, not making any very vigorous attempt. "I see nothing but some yellow pates. I'll imagine it."

"If you would push through the crowd you could see it," she said anxiously.

"It's very snug in here, don't you think?" said Felix composedly. "And we are doing a deed of charity; we are keeping shop for the absent owner."

"Here he comes. The procession has moved on. We had better go."

"No; please stay half a second. I'm bound to buy something after taking possession in this cool manner. Won't you help me?"

He glanced at the contents of the little booth—

coarse lace and yellow embroidery, gingerbread and turron—a mixture of honey and almonds—of every quality, aristocratic and plebeian.

"Do you like that sticky stuff?" he said doubtfully.

"No, not much; I've outgrown that taste," she said, laughing.

"Well, this is rather desperate, isn't it?" he said, with comical ruefulness. "Why don't they have things a fellow can buy? I've an old aunt at home who goes in for laces—the more tattered and the yellower the better. But that looks suspiciously new."

"Oh, you mustn't buy that for her. It's only cotton."

"I suppose she would disown me? Well, I can't take her a cake of gingerbread, and she is past the age for confectionary. With the best will in the world, I can't be a dutiful nephew, it would seem."

But, as he spoke, his glance lit on what proved to be a treasure. It was a small ring, which lay among some worthless glass trinkets—a little finger ring, of battered and discoloured silver; but it had signs of being a genuine relic; perhaps dating from the time of the Moorish occupation. Felix examined it curiously, and then he made out that it had a device of clasped hands. It might have been

a pledge of love's constancy in some old-forgotten days.

"I'll buy this," he said suddenly, laying down the price demanded without a murmur, to the unfeigned surprise of the dealer, who had counted on an excited passage of bargaining.

"You have paid far too much for it," said Di quietly. "Don't you know, Spaniards always ask twice what they expect to get?"

"Very likely; but you see I wanted it."

"Will your aunt like it?" she asked, looking at the trinket without admiration.

"Oh, my aunt"—he began to laugh—"she's an old lady, you know. But she has pretty hands, and she wears a lot of sparkling rings—diamonds and sapphires."

"Then I shouldn't think she would care for that one."

"Very likely not. She wouldn't appreciate its antiquity, you think? Well, perhaps we may see something else that will please her better."

He spoke carelessly. Still he seemed to prize the ancient hoop of silver, which he placed for safety on his smallest finger. He had certainly paid a great deal for it.

There were at this fair many things that were pleasant and enlivening, a great deal of colour and sound, a brightness and a gaiety

that were very infectious. Felix strolled about well content at his companion's side, following the course determined for them by the moving throng. He was in no hurry, seemingly, to rejoin the lost members of the party. Di looked about her diligently, but she could see them nowhere.

"Don't you think we had better wait for them?" she asked.

"Oh no," he answered carelessly; "they'll be sure to turn up immediately. It's never a good plan to look for people in a crowd. You may chase each other all day, whereas, if you take no trouble, you are certain to meet."

But it is a very strange fact that whenever Felix, who was tall, caught the most distant glimpse of a certain waving purple feather, he immediately saw something in the opposite direction that arrested his attention.

The centre of the wide space was filled with a motley crowd of peasants from every quarter of the peninsula. Here an Andalusian—a trim figure in tight black jacket, crimson sash, and trousers of a wonderful stripe, a bit of a dandy in the careful arrangement of his plaited pigtail; there a La Manchan, with high jack-boots of untanned leather; or a Murcian, bare and bronzed of limb, and with sandalled feet. Again, it was a Valencian who outshone all the others

in the gorgeousness of his raiment, and who had the air of a theatrical brigand, because, above his full white sleeves and finely embroidered waistcoat, there rose a face that was tragic almost to laughableness in its stern and majestic gloom.

Where could a young man find a better opportunity of studying "backgrounds," and other things, than here?

Felix made good use of his opportunities. His thirst for information was great. He invented a pretext for halting at every stall, apparently for nothing in the world but to ask his companion questions, or to pass the most irreverent remarks on the time-honoured national costumes.

"Look at that miserable imitation of a kilt," he said, pointing to the owner of a pair of short trousers, that stood out like a full shirt. "Oh, I forgot, you have never seen a kilt."

"No; my cousin Bell says it is the only sensible costume, and that every man ought to wear it."

"Even the pale-faced Saxons? Will she not receive me unless I appear in the garb of old Gaul?"

"I should think she isn't so silly. Is the Highland dress really like that?"

"Well, they don't go in for so much lawn in

the north; and it is rather the exception than the rule to go about with a bandaged head, unless, perhaps, after a fair."

"He hasn't hurt himself," said Di, laughing; "that handkerchief is instead of a cap. Look! they all wear it tightly knotted like that."

Then Felix professed a great desire to inspect this curious and brilliant head-dress a little nearer, and drew her round to the other side of the square so fast that one might almost have said he had a wilier purpose in view. And there they found a stall, at which nothing was sold but flowers—rare blossoms from the balmy south. Felix immediately proposed to buy some. He took a long time to choose. He would have nothing but the most perfect blooms, and the most spotless and glossy leaves; and there was a great deal of laughter over his blundering attempts to explain himself to the buxom Andalusian who sold them, and who wore a rose coquettishly placed behind her ear.

Felix thought this a charming fashion, and was telling Di so, while in the same breath he begged her to take care of the flowers for him. What had he to do with flowers? They would be wasted in his room in the hotel, which he never entered all day long; and, besides, how could he arrange them? A man's fingers were

not for dainty operations like that. He held out his broad palm in derision. Miss Ouvry really must relieve him of them; he had noticed a vase of hers at home.

In the middle of all this expenditure of eloquence over a trifle—since why should she not take the flowers?—the crowd parted, and the lost ladies appeared.

"Here you are at last," said Mrs. Henshaw, in a voice that was not perfectly sweet. "We have been looking for you everywhere, everywhere, and the people so rude!"

"Do you think so?" said Felix innocently. "I was just comparing them favourably a minute ago with our holiday-makers at home. I think it's a very fine sight."

"You have not shared my anxiety, I am afraid," she replied, with a touch of asperity. To be jostled and pushed about is not good for the temper, and it did not add to her amiability to find that she had not even been missed. "I thought of all sorts of dreadful things. Mr. Malleson was very much surprised not to find you with us, Miss Ouvry; but, as I tell him, if young ladies choose to be so independent——"

"Oh, is Ralph here?" Di interrupted, immediately beginning to scan the crowd in search of him.

"He deserted us, too, when he didn't find

you," said Philippa. "Oh, what lovely flowers, Di! Have you been buying anything?"

"Nothing at all. Mr. Chester bought a little ring; but we saw nothing else worth having."

"Oh, do let us see it!" She turned to him. "I saw nothing in the way of jewellery except rosaries, if that can be called jewellery."

He drew the little hoop silently, and perhaps reluctantly, from his finger, and handed it to her.

"It is very quaint." She looked at it curiously.

Her left hand was bare, and she thoughtlessly slipped it on to one of her fingers.

"It is too large," she said carelessly. "You must have it cleaned before you wear it."

"Its dimness is one of its great charms," said Felix, coming a little nearer to look at it. "See how much worn it is. A new silver ring would have no value at all."

At that moment Mrs. Henshaw, who had also been looking for Mr. Malleson, turned her glance upon her daughter.

"What have you got there, Philippa?" she said, putting up her eye-glass. "Did Mr. Chester buy that for you? How kind of him!"

"No," said Philippa hastily, drawing the ring off and handing it back.

He looked at her for an instant gravely.

"Pray keep it," he said. "It is of no value; but it is quaint, as you say, and I think genuinely old."

"It was not intended for me," she said a little proudly; "it was mamma's mistake."

"I am afraid you are very ungracious," said her mother easily. "Look at Miss Ouvry; she did not make any scruple about her flowers, and such very pretty flowers, too."

Deonys glanced down at her bouquet, and flushed slowly.

"Yes," said Felix lightly, "that's what I'll call you, if you refuse to accept it; it will be very ungracious of you. Have you forgotten that this is Christmas Day? It has evidently done duty as a token of friendship before now, if you will consider it in that light again——"

Here Ralph Malleson came up, and, in his greeting, the other words that Felix may have said were lost to Di. He had called the little trinket a token of friendship—not the finer, more sacred word, he had said to himself, when he looked at the clasped hands fashioned long ago to seal some dead lover's ardent vows. Did Philippa notice this, too? Di never knew on what terms she had accepted the gift, but she wore it constantly, in spite of it being too large for her slender third finger.

Mrs. Henshaw's greeting to Ralph was warm, almost effusive.

"You see, we have found this naughty, truant girl," she said. "I give her into your hands; you must take charge of her. She is really beyond my control. My own child is enough for me. Young people are so wilful and so independent nowadays."

"I will take care of her," said Ralph sedately, drawing her arm through his own; "she won't escape me."

He took her a few paces apart.

"What have you been doing to get into disgrace?" he asked, looking at her with mock solemnity. "This is a fine character to get of you, Miss Di!"

"The crowd separated us from the others; everybody was running to see the procession," she said, looking up at him with more gravity than the occasion seemed to warrant.

"I dare say the crowd will be obliging enough to do it again," he made answer. "Here is a loophole of escape. Don't you want to get away from all this now?"

"Oh yes, Ralph, if you don't mind taking me, I'd like to go. Unless you would rather stay a little longer?"

"Well, I've seen all this before, you know, and I haven't Felix's robust interest in specta-

cular shows. I rather think that young man imagines all this has been got up for his benefit. He will take as much interest in it as if he had been paid for the entire performance."

"I suppose so," she answered absently; but in her own mind she was just a little doubtful of Mr. Chester's absolute enjoyment; she had seen a look on his face but a moment ago that did not betoken entire cheerfulness. That sudden gravity of his expression when he looked at Philippa puzzled her. Did it mean this, or that? It might mean so many things; but, then, it might also mean nothing at all. And the ring? That it was a gift for his aunt was a little fiction in which she was not so foolish as to believe; but had he meant it for Philippa, or —for some one else? All these were questions which it was manifestly impossible she could answer, so she wisely determined to spend no more conjecture on the matter, but to enjoy the pleasure of the hour with her friend. It was like old times to walk again with Ralph, good kind Ralph, who was so comfortable a companion, content to talk or to be silent, and not exacting in the matter of replies.

So they went and took a look at the holiday gathering in the Prado, and listened to the music.

"I dare say Philippa is wishing she was with

us," said Di; "but if I had asked her to come, I'd have been snubbed again." She looked at him mischievously.

"I couldn't undertake the responsibility of looking after two young ladies," said Ralph gravely. "One independent and self-willed young woman is quite enough; and I have noticed that it requires both her mother and Felix to keep Miss Philippa in order. I shouldn't have said Felix was good at that sort of thing, should you? But Mrs. Henshaw seems to have great faith in his powers."

"Take me down to the river," said Di, with an air of command; "and don't spoil our holiday by saying disagreeable things."

So they forthwith strolled to the banks of the Manzanares, and lingered near a certain little house, from which there issued sounds of happy laughter, and of children's voices full of glee.

Presently, they were rewarded for their patience by seeing that royal lady, Doña Victoria, who had herself come to superintend the feast she had ordered for her special *protégés*—the children of the washerwomen; and the sight of this gentle queen's sweet face always touched one young girl with feelings of great loyalty and affection.

That, perhaps, was the happiest hour of this unusual holiday. In the evening, they were all

to dine at the Hôtel de Paris. Felix had been very eager about this, and would take no refusal. He had asked everybody, and had engaged the largest private room, and made vast and elaborate preparations.

The little English colony was largely represented. Major Gibbs was there, pompous and congratulatory; and even Mrs. St. John and her busy husband had been included.

Di dressed for this feast without much anticipation of enjoyment. She wore a dark plain dress without any ornament, its severity unrelieved even by one of the flowers which she had put carefully in water.

Her fingers had hovered lovingly about the roses, as she arranged them in her little vases; but some of their sweetness had vanished from these rare winter blossoms, since they had been chosen for her. There had been a look in a certain lady's eyes, and a word spoken by her, that had made Di say to herself—

"No, I shall not wear you; not one of you."

She looked very young, almost childish in her scanty dress, and that made it seem quite natural that she should sit very silent during the evening, and take no large share in the talk. The dinner was a very grand affair indeed, and Felix made an admirable host. Mrs. Henshaw sat near him, and talked a great deal; they had

spent the afternoon together, and had many little recollections in common. A young nephew of Mrs. St. John's fell to Philippa's share, and her ripple of laughter hardly ever ceased. Di privately considered Washington Bean rather a tiresome and stupid boy, and wondered what amusement Philippa could extract out of his small witticisms; but Philippa had the happy gift of amusing herself under the most adverse circumstances. It was Di's first experience of a ceremonious dinner-party, and she took a great interest in all the proceedings. She thought her father much the handsomest man in the room, and she listened with the honestest admiration to his refined remarks; but she was not sorry to take shelter behind Miss Barbara's large presence when they retired to the drawing-room, and to spend herself in comforting Miss Piper, who was a little neglected by the other ladies, and was still under the ban of Miss Barbara's displeasure.

Malleson was not present. He had declined on the score of having to make up for an idle day. He had made his deliberate choice between that hour of Di's undivided companionship and this larger gathering of all his countrymen, where he could not hope to secure her for himself.

"It's my belief he's elaborating a private

scheme for the redemption of this unfortunate country," said Felix, explaining his absence. "It seems to me an immense waste of time. If you could get the different parties to combine there might be a chance, but you might as well expect water and fire to agree; 'they don't combine, they only conspire.'"

"Then you don't take much interest in politics?" said Mr. St. John, himself a keen diplomatist.

Felix shook his head.

"The question is too hopelessly intricate and too vast for an outsider to grasp. I can't pretend to unravel it. I confess I care nothing at all for anything in Spain, but what it has to offer in the way of amusement, and politics I don't include under that head."

"Bull-fights and cock-fights?" suggested Mr. Washington Bean. "There was a *funcion* in the cock-circus last Sunday."

"You didn't go?" Philippa asked.

"Well, ah, no," said the boy, "I happened to have something else to do, you know."

"I don't count these among my amusements any more than you do, Bean," said Felix, who understood the lad, and knew him to be not quite the finished man of the world he wished to appear.

"You may find your amusement cut off pretty

smartly one of these days," said the American dryly. "We are on the brink of a revolution, sir."

"Unless one were to find that amusing, too?"

"Amusing! it's disgusting," thundered the major. "The country isn't fit for a gentleman to live in."

"Rodriguez was in great form to-day," said Mr. Ouvry, and thereupon the talk drifted to the topics of the hour, and a great many wonderful opinions were hazarded, maintained, contradicted, disputed, reaffirmed. Through it all, Mrs. Henshaw comforted herself with the certainty of British protection, and shook her head over the frail chances of those ladies who had not been honoured with an introduction to the English chief.

Felix hardly exchanged a word all evening with the companion of his morning's ramble; but he was often near her, and she found all her little wants carefully anticipated. On his part, he had an indescribable sense of comfort and well-being whenever he glanced—and his glances were frequent—at a certain corner, where a young girl dressed in black was holding herself a little aloof, looking out on the gay company with candid, serious eyes.

With all these distractions it was, perhaps,

no great wonder that Bell's letter should have been forgotten.

Deonys suddenly remembered it one morning, a few days later, and reproached herself keenly for her neglect. She read it with great bewilderment, and an uncomfortable sinking of heart. This scheme of visiting England seemed all at once to lose its long anticipated charm, now that it lay with her to carry it out. Bell's letter was very earnest, her arguments strong; she was, perhaps, a trifle more dogmatic that usual. Di did not say this to herself; she only assured herself that she did not want to accept the invitation; she found nothing persuasive in her cousin's words. However, she had little time to entertain her dislike, for there was another plan afoot for that day.

Mrs. Henshaw, secure in the possession of Lady Louisa Berry's goodwill, had conceived the bold project of paying a visit to the Escurial. The daring of this scheme existed chiefly in the lady's imagination. There had been rumours of a Carlist approach from without, rumours of disaffection among the troops within the city. No one, who had any experience, put much faith in this renewed cry of "Wolf, wolf!" but Mrs. Henshaw had no experience, and she was fired with a desire to prove that a Briton knows no fear.

"What is the use of being English if you do not exercise your rights?" she asked, though wherein lay her superior claim to invade the monastery was not apparent. "It is necessary to show that we are not afraid," she said to her daughter.

"If it were a nunnery!" cried Philippa. "I have a wholesome fear of nuns; but monks are delightful."

In spite of her courage, however, the matron was not uncareful to secure the escort of the gentlemen. Mr. Ouvry excused himself with gracefully expressed regret: "A little engagement—a trifling matter of business, which, unfortunately, claimed his attention." It is well-known to everybody that in January the Escurial is like a cellar. Mr. Malleson, less ceremonious, gave a vague promise of possibly joining them in the course of the afternoon. Felix alone was found willing to be of the party from the first.

It was cold, as Mr. Ouvry had privately predicted, and there was a great sadness and gloom about the colossal gridiron. You have there an impression of vast dreariness, of confining walls that rise everywhere about you—of an intolerable silence. The silvery sierras, lifted abruptly in the background, add to this feeling of imprisonment. Against them the great convent,

with its curiously precise lines of white and black, stands out in cold prominence. It is, as Felix called it, a stupendous harmony in grey.

There were light drifts of snow from the spurs of the Guadarramas, borne along by a wind that cut like a knife. The gloom of Philip's dark and intolerant spirit seemed to brood everywhere, and to rest like a curse on the barren and frozen earth. It is all Philip II. You forget the successors to his name, and the empresses and queens who also rest in the gorgeous Pantheon of Kings; even the great Charles is not remembered. After three centuries it is still Philip who is the haunting spirit of San Lorenzo.

To Mrs. Henshaw this gloomy monarch, heir to the largest kingdom in the world, was but a dim and shadowy figure, with no clear place in her slender store of dates. She had been brought up in the comfortable mistakes of a past generation. She believed in Clarence's butt of Malmsey; Henry VIII. was to her the original of Bluebeard; Tell's apple an indisputable fact. These and other picturesque legends were the strongest points in her historical armour. Thus, though she knew little about the great founder, she was prepared to be impressed by such signs of his presence as still exist. There is the mean little cell—where this lord of half the world

died—furnished after the fashion of a garret; like the blood on the steps at Holyrood, and the block at the Tower, on no account to be missed.

Mrs. Henshaw could not tear herself away from it. The Goya tapestry was nothing to it, one could see tapestry every day. She sat down on one rickety chair after another; she peeped through the little slide that opens to the church; Philippa's attention was claimed at every moment; Felix, too, was asked a great many questions which, to tell the truth, that young gentleman, in spite of his university career, found it not easy to answer.

Deonys slipped away at last, leaving them in charge of the custodian, who spoke a broken jargon he called English. Philippa would fain have followed her, but this was not permitted. Her mamma was shocked at her want of interest, at the slight advantage she took of this great opportunity of instruction.

"As for me, I cannot acquire enough. To learn something; to add to one's store every day, that is such an excellent rule."

In her zeal for information she attached herself to the guide, and begged Mr. Chester to look after Philippa.

"She is so wilful, and she may run away and lose herself," she remarked playfully.

"It isn't a catacomb," said Philippa, smiling, "though it is almost as cheerful."

Felix obeyed with a good grace, though he looked a little longingly at the door out of which Di had fled.

She knew the monastery well, and it had for her a certain charm; but on this day its silence and austerity froze the blood in her veins. She strolled into the garden, a prim and Dutch-like arrangement of fountains, clipped myrtles, and straight white paths, with a wide beyond of bare and rugged plain.

Here Ralph Malleson, who knew her tastes, joined her.

"Playing truant again!" he said. "Why aren't you improving the shining hour, Miss Di?"

"Oh, I don't know. I got tired of it," she answered.

"What a lack of enthusiasm! How sadly indifferent young people are nowadays!" he said, with fine gravity.

"Don't,"—she shook her head at him—"I've just escaped from all that. There were too many of us; one ought not to come here in a crowd; and besides, I hate chatter," she added energetically.

"Does that mean that I am to go away?" he asked, with great civility.

"No, of course not. Oh, Ralph, I'm glad you have come. Something has happened."

"Something is always happening now," he said dismally. "Has Mr. Ferryman turned up again?"

"Oh no! But this is very serious—for me."

"Well?" he questioned.

They were standing on a broad terrace. He did not turn to look at her, but his mind touched swiftly on a great many possibilities.

"Well?" he repeated, a little impatiently.

"I have had a letter from my cousin Bell—an invitation to go to England, and the father says I ought to accept it."

"Is that all?" he said, with the lightness of relief. "I thought you were going to give me a disagreeable shock."

"I think it is disagreeable enough for me."

"I thought you would have welcomed a chance of widening your horizons—isn't that the phrase? I have a dim recollection of a young lady who was anxious not so very long ago to try the strength of her wings."

"One changes one's mind sometimes," she said, with dignity; then she relapsed into her former tone. "It is so far away," she said dolefully; "and to go for months away from everybody, all alone."

"I'll go with you, and look after you."

He spoke with utmost carelessness; but he had a sense of quickened pulses, of a sudden hope.

"Oh, if you could,"—she looked at him with frank pleasure in her eyes—"how good that would be! But, of course, it can't be managed; there is your work."

"There is my work; but I might play truant, like you."

"The father says I am to go with Mrs. Henshaw in spring. But I don't want to go with her. I love Philippa, but Mrs. Henshaw——"

"Well, I don't love her either," said Ralph, so gravely that they both laughed.

"It isn't only that. One can get on with people without caring much for them, but she makes me so uncomfortable. Ralph," she said impulsively, "why does she speak so about mamma? What can she know about her? She has no right to say such things to me. They are not true!"

He looked at her in unfeigned surprise.

"Your mother? What things——" He began; but she gave a little wave of her hand, as if to enforce silence.

For, down the broad alley, between the trim and stiff myrtles, came the lady in question. Philippa and her companion were behind. Mrs.

Henshaw walked a little in front with the guide, who was pouring out disjointed fragments of information, to which she listened with an air of deriving much benefit.

CHAPTER IX.

"Knightly guests and courtly pageantries."

MALLESON had no further opportunity on that occasion to ask the meaning of Di's words, of the trouble in her eyes. Mrs. Henshaw had decided to remain all night at the inn, that she might the better satisfy her thirst for information. Malleson represented that the accommodation was barbarous, the food uneatable, and the charges extortionate, all of which only helped to strengthen the lady's determination.

"It would be wrong—wicked to neglect so great an opportunity," she said, with her serious air. "As for these young people, it is an education. I must not deprive them, at whatever inconvenience to myself, of a chance of increasing their little store of knowledge. If there is danger, we can face it," she added, with a noble simplicity.

"I wish my education had always been conducted on this principle," said Philippa. "My

namesake's gridiron is a much pleasanter school than the old French convent in the Rue Blanc."

"Were you educated in a convent?"

"There and other places." She turned to Felix. "Sometimes a convent, sometimes a pension with mamma. One can learn a good deal in a pension, you know; and we have a liberal acquaintance with most of the better known ones."

"I have striven to place my daughter in the way of the best European culture. I have sacrificed myself to her; but she has had great opportunities—more than I ever had, I am sure, at Miss Black's, in Brighton, though she was an excellent creature, and so expensive."

"And now, I am being finished off with a course of sight-seeing," said Philippa gravely. "You see, it is necessary for us to spend the night at the Miranda. We have not seen the relics."

"Well, whoever remains, I, at least, must go," said Ralph. They were all standing on the broad terrace, and the guide was waiting respectfully for his fee. "Di, you will come with me?"

She assented eagerly; but was immediately overruled by her hostess.

"Not at all, my dear," she said graciously. "You must not desert us; you must be my

cicerone, and tell me all you know. We shall go off by ourselves, and see everything comfortably. I must say you are an excellent guide. As for Philippa, naughty child, one cannot count on her as a companion."

"You forget, mamma, I have my education to complete. I have not had Di's chances."

"How is it to be, then?" said Malleson, a trifle impatiently. "I must be off. Is any one coming?"

"I will stay with the ladies, of course," said Felix, speaking for the first time, having apparently only made up his mind, in spite of that "of course." "I don't pretend to be much of a protection, still——"

"You will be very useful—to apply strong language to mine host of the inn," said Philippa.

"And you, Di?" Ralph turned to the young girl at his side.

"If Mrs. Henshaw wishes it, I'll stay," she said quietly.

"I wish it even more than mamma, Di."

"Well, then, good-bye," said Malleson, cutting short his farewells, and striding hastily down the long alley.

He went off somewhat provoked with Di, if the truth must be told. He thought she ought to have gone with him. He did not understand her hesitation; he would not, perhaps, have

understood it even if she had explained its source.

Already she had half-repented her impulsive words. She felt a quick compunction for that hastily-spoken confidence; it seemed petty and mean in the face of the lady's renewed kindness. Besides, she wanted, above all things, to be loyal to Philippa; and if by staying she could help her—— Her glance wandered to the young man and the maiden walking a pace or two in front, while she came behind, Mrs. Henshaw's arm confidentially linked in her own, Mrs. Henshaw's voice in her ear. Her eyes were very grave as she looked, but they were full of the most honest kindness.

Ralph could hardly have entered into these subtle motives; perhaps in his man's way of looking at broad facts alone he would not have sympathized with them. He pondered a great deal over her indignant little protest. It seemed to him a horrible thing that one woman could be thus cruel to another. It justified him in his early dislike of Mrs. Henshaw. What could she have to say against the dead woman, saintly and sweet as the young girl herself, he felt sure. Could jealousy outlast all these years, and burn over this long-forgotten grave? All his old doubts revived. He felt that there was something hidden, something it might be well

for him to know, if only to shield Di from this petty spite. If it was settled that she should pay that visit to England, he made up his mind that, at whatever cost to himself, he would arrange to be there at the same time. He was her guardian—he had got into the way of calling himself that, perhaps because he feared to use a more intimate word—and who had a better right to look after her?

It happened that at this time he was more than usually busy, and he did not see his English friends again for some days. Even Felix seemed to avoid him, though that idler's absence was hardly to be regretted when one was at work. Had anything happened during that extended visit to the Escurial, and had Felix made use of the opportunities so liberally given him?

Once, when he was hurrying out on business, he met Philippa. The street was a narrow one, and a knot of idlers, that quickly spread into a crowd, had gathered across it, as people gathered in those days on any shadow of a pretext. One voice was raised in dispute, and was greeted with angry shrugs and murmurs. Philippa stood on the edge of the pavement, having just come out of a shop. She hesitated, in doubt which way to turn, and grew frightened under the bold looks of admiration that were cast at her.

Malleson went to her at once.

"You ought not to be out alone," he said. "What can your mother be thinking of?"

"We wanted something that was forgotten for to-night, and Blake could not be spared," she explained. "We can't pass, Mr. Malleson; look how the people have gathered."

"Here, give me your hand. Now follow me, and don't look to the right or to the left. Shut your eyes and your ears, if you can."

"Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed, when his broad shoulders had made a path for her. "What should I have done if I had not met you?"

"You would have gone back the other way, I suppose," he said dryly. "And I think, in future, Miss Henshaw, you had better have some one with you when you walk out. Spanish compliments are not famed for delicacy, and even a lady who is used to much admiration might find them embarrassing."

"You think I like to have people look at me as—as these students did just now," she said bitterly. "You think I am gratified by their impertinent notice, and that——"

"Pardon me," he said, "I have not presumed to think on the matter at all."

"What a snub!"

She laughed, and tried her best to recover

from her vexation, and when she spoke again it was to say, quite pleasantly—

"I promise you I won't lay myself open to anything so horrible again; but mamma's cap hadn't come, and everything must give way to ball finery. You are going to-night?"

"I am not vain enough to suppose any one will miss me if I stay away."

"We shall—Di and I. Do come."

"To swell the train of you admirers? Won't Felix do instead of me? He understands the duties of a cavalier much better than I do. You have taught him a great deal, but I am past teaching."

"I?" she said, looking at him doubtfully and flushing deeply.

Then she turned her head away. Her pride was in arms. She would not ask him what he meant, how much he knew. The next moment, with one of her quick changes, she looked at him again, and said, almost humbly—

"It is you who have been his best teacher, and Di's, too. I never knew before how much I had missed till I had seen Di. If you would take me for a pupil—— "

"You do me too much honour," he said, in his mocking way. He saw in this faltering speech nothing but a coquettish attempt to win him back to a long lost allegiance. He told

himself that she could not do without even his poor measure of admiration and homage; but in this he wronged her. He did not know, never did know, how ardently this proud girl wished to stand well in his esteem.

"How could a poor recluse like me presume to instruct a finished lady of the world?" he went on in the same tone. "Here we are at your own door, Miss Henshaw. And the next time you want to go shopping, I'd advise you to borrow Blake, or, if you prefer it, I'll lend you Anchel."

"You would rather spare him than go yourself," she retorted. "Do you know how often you have snubbed me this afternoon?"

"Then it had better be Anchel, for, though he will very likely snub you—he keeps me in order—you will have the advantage of not understanding him."

"Good-bye." She turned away. 'Why was he always so bitter in his speech with her?'

He was about to move away, but he caught at that instant some flash of aggrieved shame, some hint of real feeling, to which his better nature answered. He could be harsh to no one who was in earnest.

"What can I do for you?" he said gently.

"If I knew what you wished——" she faltered.

"My wishes are nothing," he answered quickly, though he felt sure he understood her. It seemed to him as if he held Felix's fate in his hands; as if, in her softer mood, a word from him might change the current of two lives. Yet all he said was—

"Be true. I can tell you nothing else than that. Put the truth first, and follow it. Be brave enough to face it; it will be your surest friend."

"The truth? Ah! it is easy for you," she said; and, without another word, she left him.

He had forgotten all about the ball, but he made up his mind on the spot that he would present himself for an hour at Mrs. St. John's reception. His dress-coat was of an ancient cut, and much less comfortable than the old velvet jacket sacred to his den; his ball-room manners sat on him with hardly greater ease; but when there is a young girl, who is one's idea of all that is sweet and gracious in womanhood, to claim one's services, what sacrifice would be counted too great? The meeting with Philippa had only served to point a contrast, and to turn his thoughts to her friend. And had not Di said—

"Ralph, you will be a good boy, and come to please me?"

The long-anticipated moment, which had

caused such a flutter of expectation in the breasts of all the ladies, had at last arrived. The two girls, with whom we are chiefly concerned, were dressed and waiting Mrs. Henshaw's summons. Di had descended one flight of the stairs, and was with Philippa in the gilded salon. There was a smouldering fire of charcoal in the grate, and she stood looking down rather absently at the dull glow. Philippa hovered about her, putting last light touches to her toilet, and fastening the drooping roses in her hair. All her care seemed to be that her friend should look well.

"Now, come," she said, and led Di, faintly resisting, to a long glass at the other end of the room.

Di looked at herself with great wonder growing in her eyes. This slender damsel, with the soft white draperies touched here and there with the flush of deep red roses, was a revelation to her. She stared at the reflected image with gravest glances.

"The padre was right," she said at last. "I am quite grown up."

Philippa was kneeling at her feet, critically arranging a fold of the shining gauze. She glanced up and laughed.

"'You don't want to go back to the nursery,

"I don't know," said Di, with a soft sigh. "It is nice to be young."

"But it is also nice to go to one's first ball, and to wear a new dress, and to look charming."

"Do you think I look nice?" Her tone was anxious. "I think I do—a little. But I don't know myself. It's like being introduced to a new self."

"Well, don't you like the new self?"

"I'm not sure that I know how to behave," said Di, shaking her head at the fine young lady in the glass.

"Oh, that comes by instinct. You can't miss it; it is in the very air of the ball-room."

"If there were French tenses in the air it would be more useful. Stand up beside me, Philippa."

The other face that the mirror reflected was beautiful and brilliant, and at this moment it was soft with great kindness and generosity.

"You are so tall!" cried Di.

"If one were seeking a situation as parlour-maid it might be an advantage," said Philippa, with her quick, dimpling smile; "or, if one were always living in a crowd; but, as it is, you dainty people have all the proverbs on your side. 'Good gear goes into little bulk;' 'Ill weeds grow apace.' I could quote you a dozen."

"It must be nice to be beautiful," said Di, not heeding, "beautiful as you are, Philippa."

Philippa answered her earnest look with an odd whimsical smile.

"What a dear innocent goose you are," she said, kissing her. "Of course it is nice. That is mamma calling. That kiss was for good-bye. We are two princesses going out on our adventures. When we meet again, what a great deal there will be to hear and to tell!"

Light words easily spoken. Who could know that the last hour of this their fair and prosperous friendship had almost arrived; that never again, spite of tears and brave prayers and perhaps sorrowful repentance, there could be entire unbroken truth on the one side, love that was not ashamed on the other? But these things were as yet in the distance.

Mrs. Henshaw came in with a great sweep and rustle of magnificent skirts, Blake following with an armful of wraps.

"Well, are you ready, young ladies?" said the matron, who was in excellent temper. "Philippa, where are your flowers? You must not keep us all waiting, child."

"I am quite ready, mamma."

"She has given them all to me," said Di, ing shyly forward. "She would do it. ver thinks of herself."

"She has made you look very nice, at any rate," said Mrs. Henshaw, with a thin smile. "You need a little colour; and Philippa always looks best in pure white, I must say."

"Then I'll wear these," said Philippa composedly, taking some rejected blossoms from a vase. "Please, dear old Blake, will you fetch me some pins—long ones?"

"Nonsense, Philippa," said her mamma sharply, "you really are too perverse. Pink and yellow! Do you want to make yourself a fright?"

"It will be considered the latest outcome of æstheticism. See if Mrs. Cross doesn't appear in a pink and yellow bonnet on Sunday. Besides, it is quite correct. This is the reign of tertiaries. No, Di, I won't have any of your roses. You must be content with primaries."

"What a wilful child she is!" Mrs. Henshaw addressed herself to the other girl. "And she doesn't look so very ugly, after all, does she? I was like that myself, you know. I could wear any colour—not like some people who have always to study their complexions."

"She looks beautiful!" said Di, with warm admiration.

"And you look very nice, too, my dear, though I must not make you vain."

"I've heard of a royal lady who pinned moral

maxims inside her dress as a check on vanity," said Philippa gravely. "She could wear the richest stuffs with safety then. Suppose you try it, Di. I would recommend 'Pride goes before a fall.'"

"Never mind her," said Mrs. Henshaw graciously; "you really look very nice. We know somebody who will think so, at any rate—don't we? Oh, we shall make a great impression in a certain quarter, never fear."

"Don't be mysterious, mamma," said Philippa, still busy over her flowers. "We mean to impress everybody—to conquer all round."

"I know what Mrs. Henshaw means," said Di, flushing and speaking with a touch of indignation. She had heard these gentle insinuations more than once of late. "But it is quite a mistake. Ralph is my dear old friend, and we are always glad to see each other; but he is not—not what you mean." She turned to the lady. "And I don't think it is nice to be always thinking about lovers."

"Well, I must say"—Mrs. Henshaw drew herself up—"that is a pretty speech for a young lady to make!"

"I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to be rude. I only meant to tell you it was a mistake."

"It is only mamma's way of saying a pretty

thing," said Philippa, coming up and laying her hands on Di's shoulders. "She thinks us irresistible, and fancies that everybody must find us so."

"Oh, pray don't make excuses for me, my dear," said her mother loftily. "I am accustomed to be misconstrued. I can bear it in silence. If Miss Ouvry does not care that I should interest myself in her, I can refrain from offending in future."

This was hardly a prosperous beginning to an evening of gaiety or of conquest, and it was a relief to all present when Pepita burst in to announce that the carriage was waiting, and the señor ready to conduct the ladies to it.

This small damsel's black eyes blazed with excitement as she stared at the grand dresses. Concha was hovering in the background to peep at them, too; and even Blake, the prim and sedate, was full of mild fussiness. Deonys felt as if every one was enjoying her *début* except herself. She could not get used to this new self. She had begun by making a mistake.

Mr. Ouvry politely gave his arm to the older lady.

"You will look after my little girl," he said, as he carefully adjusted the trains before shutting the door of the carriage. "Di, I'll look in upon you by-and-by."

"I will do my best," said Mrs. Henshaw, still

offended. "But some people do not choose to be restrained."

"Oh, do come soon, padre," Di said imploringly.

She felt as if she were parting from all her past. There was a weight on her heart that was hardly in accord with the feelings ascribed in novels to young ladies going to a first ball. Still, when she reached the great room, not very crowded as yet, and saw the lights and the decorations, and heard the inspiriting music, she could not help forgetting her unwillingness for a little, and enjoying the spectacle.

Among other things, she had prepared herself for the unpleasantness of a conversation with Mrs. St. John, who, she had innocently fancied, would be ready to let fly the light shafts of her wit at every new-comer. But Mrs. St. John was much too busy to take the smallest notice of her, and the few words she said were all addressed to Philippa, in whom she recognized a friendly rival.

They had hardly been seated, when Di espied Miss Piper making timid signs to her behind her cheap fan.

"She wants me. I must go to her. She is all alone," she said; and, without waiting a reply, she rose and crossed the room, forsaking Mrs. Henshaw, to her deep displeasure.

"I wash my hands of her!" she cried. "A girl who can walk about a ball-room alone! Indeed, I cannot undertake to be responsible for her behaviour."

Nothing but the desire to give pleasure to her friend would have lent her courage to cross that wide space. But she did not see the many eyes that watched her modest steps. All her glances were for Miss Piper—a transformed, radiant, smiling Miss Piper.

She got an eager welcome.

"Oh, do come and sit beside me, my dear. I have been looking for you for the last hour or more. I came early, you know—too early, I suppose, though it was the hour mentioned—and perhaps Mrs. St. John was detained."

"Were you alone?" said Di wonderingly.

"For a little while—a little while. But it was very amusing, you know, watching them light up, and hearing the musicians tune their instruments. Then Miss Barbara came, and, oh, my dear, she was so displeased!"

"With you?"

"With me? Oh yes. But with Mrs. St. John, too. I thought at first she would not speak to me, but she did—across the room. She said we were invited at eight, and she came at eight. Between ourselves it was ten minutes past eight when she entered, but, you know, Miss Barbara

thinks her watch infallible. And she said it was so rude of the hostess not to receive us. I was trembling all the time in case some one should hear her. There were servants about, and you never can tell a servant from a gentleman when they are all dressed alike. I was so nervous. Think if the minister had come in!"

"Well, he would deserve to be scolded," said Di, smiling. "I think it is very stupid to ask people so long before you want or expect them."

"I was always taught that it was polite to be punctual. It was one of dear mamma's rules; but Miss Barbara blamed me for being too soon. I am sure poor Robert's watch keeps excellent time," cried the little lady, referring to a large gold chronometer that ticked in her belt. "Miss Barbara is a little difficult to please."

"I am sure she must have been pleased with your dress. It looks splendid," said Di heartily.

"Do you think so, my dear?" Miss Piper smoothed her blue satin lap with great satisfaction. "She thought it very extravagant—quite sinful; but I told her it was a present." She drooped her meek, rose-crowned head. "She knows I am too poor to buy such things for myself, but there cannot be any harm in accepting a present from a near relation. If it

were another gentleman—but that I could not have permitted."

"There is Mrs. Cross," said Di, feeling that this was dangerous ground; "and that is her niece in pink. Isn't she pretty?"

"A little forward, perhaps. Look, my dear, she is talking to two gentlemen at once. We must be more careful. It is better not to dance too much—not every dance."

"Oh, I don't want to dance at all," Di answered, shrinking back a little. There was a group of hothouse plants near her that made a soft screen, behind which she could peep out safely on the pageant. "I think it is much nicer to look on."

"Yes; we are very snug here and our dresses go very well together; but perhaps one might dance a little. Not to look peculiar, you know."

But though Di protested again that she would much rather sit still in her corner, this was not to be allowed. There were one or two who had discovered the sweet face, half hidden by the sheltering screen of greenery, and the American Minister—the most good-natured of hosts—took care that she was not neglected.

Mr. Washington Bean strolled up to her presently.

"You'll dance?" said this gracious youth, who was sparing of his remarks.

"No," said Di promptly, with a like economy of words.

"Can't waltz," said Mr. Bean, stroking the down on his lip. "Makes me giddy, you know; but I can worry through a quadrille."

He looked at her for a minute or two in silence, slowly fixing a glass in his eye, then he said laconically—

"Pleasure of the next quadrille?"

Di acquiesced without much cordiality. "There is Philippa going to dance," she said, looking beyond the young gentleman and trying to forget his presence.

The words acted like magic on Mr. Bean, who turned and left her with as much eagerness as so finished a man of the world could permit himself to show. To be surprised by nothing, to be shocked at nothing, to take pleasure in nothing—this was his aim in life.

"I hope he will forget all about that quadrille," said Di with fervour; but she was not to be allowed to sit in peace. The Minister himself came up with a young man on his arm, and this time there was no refusing.

She went through her part reluctantly, but with a certain shy grace that her companion of the moment found very attractive. He was a young *attaché*, new to his honours and naïvely proud of them; and he gave her a great deal of

information without caring much whether she answered or not. When the dance was over she went back to her corner. She had glanced, indeed, at Mrs. Henshaw, but that lady's aspect was forbidding, and the chair next her was occupied.

"That wasn't so bad," she said confidingly to her friend. "He speaks English, and he has a great deal to say. I hope, if I must dance again, that the next one will talk a great deal, too."

"Oh, but you must be careful, you must, indeed," cried Miss Piper, with anxiety. "Young men are so much less respectful, so much less chivalrous than they used to be. I have not been dancing and, my dear, I hear them say such things—such broad compliments!" The meek lady flushed under her roses.

"Oh, that one talked all the time about himself," said Di innocently. "Look at Philippa! I never saw any one dance so beautifully."

Philippa was, indeed, fair to see as she moved with sprightly grace through the mazes of the dance.

"Her flowers have not spoiled her. She could wear anything and look just the same," Di said, with much enthusiasm.

Miss Piper sighed, a little tremulous, deprecating sigh. Philippa was, indeed, a brilliant

and charming sight, yet her smiles hardly compensated for Miss Barbara's black looks—Miss Barbara's ostentatious aloofness as she sat among the matrons of high degree on a crimson-covered upper dais. Once upon a time Miss Piper had sat there too, and had taken her modest share in the trenchant criticism of the hour; but now the wide length of the hall divided the shabby black *moire antique* from the too-lustrous blue satin. This sitting, as it were, below the salt, was distressing only because it signalized the great breach that yawned between these two old friends; and there was the cause of it all, flitting lightly and with a perfect abandonment to the enjoyment of the moment, smiling on every one alike.

Miss Piper followed Philippa's light figure without a spark of reproach in her mild blue eyes, anxious only that her little advices and warnings should not have been given in vain.

"She is a beautiful creature," she echoed Di's praises; "and so amiable; but, my dear, don't you think she is a little—just a little imprudent, and, perhaps, too frank?" She brought the words out timidly, as if there was utmost uncharitableness in the charge.

"It is her way. She means nothing. She's the same to every one."

"It will raise expectations; it will make the

gentlemen very confident. And suppose she should get into trouble again? It is not myself I am thinking of." She gave the assurance eagerly. "I would do it all again, if I could help her. But she is so young; there is plenty of time. Why should she throw herself away, and waste her youth?"

"I think she will be more careful. I think there is——"

What was Di about to say, and why did the words fail suddenly? She was looking towards the door by which the later guests were yet entering. It was Felix who came in now, almost as if her thought had summoned him. She watched him with a strange, unexplained anxiety as he made his greetings. Now Mrs. Henshaw's fan was reached out to touch him lightly, and he turned to listen and to speak. Then some newer comer claimed her attention, and she saw him thread his way round the room.

The dance was over, and the music stopped with some abrupt chords. Philippa was walking slowly back to her mother's side. Why did he not claim her when she was free? Why did he come straight, as if he saw no one else, to a distant corner, where the branching palms half hid a young girl dressed in white, and with red roses in her hair?

"I have found you at last," he said, standing before her.

"You have just come in?"

She looked with innocent, troubled wonder at the expression of fire and earnestness in his usually careless, laughing eyes.

"Have I?" he said absently; then he turned to Miss Piper. "I want to introduce you to a friend of mine," he said. "Will you let me bring him? He is staying at the hotel, and he has just come from England."

"A gentleman?" said Miss Piper, fluttered, pleased, perturbed all at once.

"He is an old gentleman, and I think he knows some of your people. When I spoke of your brother having been chaplain here, he seemed to think he once knew him. If you will let me bring him——"

"Oh, if he knew Robert, that makes such a difference, and it would be a great pleasure. There are so few to whom one can speak of these things; but a stranger——" She hesitated and sighed.

Felix took this for a permission, and went off to find his friend.

Presently he returned with a bald-headed gentleman, who looked mild enough to still the "rt maidenly fears. He made the presentation the same form, and then it was found that, in

"It wi

order to make room for this stranger, Deonys had to rise.

Felix took it quite as a matter of course that he should give her his arm and lead her away. For what other reason had he hunted up this new acquaintance and tracked him through the labyrinth of many corridors to the billiard-room?

"Have you been dancing much?" he asked; and then he glanced at her programme, and saw but two or three names scribbled on its white surface. "May I?" He took the little pencil, and put his own initials here and there, almost at random, down the page.

Deonys looked with alarm at this repeated "F. C."

"Oh, please, not so many times," she said. "I don't want to dance at all; and I am going home quite early."

"You don't want to dance?" he said eagerly, as if this pleased him. "No more do I. But you won't go away before supper? Let me see. The dancers are sure to make a rush for the buffet after this waltz down here; that's about the time when everybody begins to feel hungry. If you want to go home soon, we might go down earlier, when it is quiet, don't you think? And we'll get Miss Piper to come with us."

"Miss Piper would be pleased."

It seemed to her afterwards as if she had never given her consent. All the time he talked he was leading her, skilfully skirting the newly-formed set of dancers, out of the ball-room and into a long, narrow hall, draped and festooned, and made beautiful with rare flowers. At the upper end of it was a broad low seat beneath a great window, its coloured panes hidden by a heavy velvet curtain. No one seemed to have discovered this remote refuge, and he led her straight to it.

"If you don't want to dance, it is cooler out here," he said easily; "and it is impossible to talk with people whirling and twirling all about you, and treading on your toes. Waltzing is the most arbitrary proceeding in the world. You are not allowed to look on in peace; you are forced to take to it in self-defence."

"I thought it was very nice to look on; but, then, that is because I dance so badly. If I could dance like Philippa——"

"Queen Philippa is holding a great court to-night," he answered lightly. "She seems to be engaged ever so many deep."

"Then you asked her?" She felt a great sense of relief, yet she wondered when he could have done it. "What a pity you were too

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the same

"It w... did not answer her directly. He was

wondering if she did not feel cold. Should he fetch her a cloak? And did she really prefer sitting here to having the tips of her toes trodden on by those aggressive couples?

And for all reply Di smiled, and remarked that it was very cool and pleasant, as, indeed, it was, now that she knew herself to be not taking that which belonged to another.

"I've got to tell you all about Kylmure, you know," he went on; "and, since I hear that you are going there by-and-by, I must prepare you. You will require to stand an examination on it. Miss Bell will expect you to be quite up in everything Scotch, won't she?"

"Bell spoke of London," said Di, with a sigh; "but I should like the country best, I think, except that it is further away. Yes, please, tell me about it in case I go."

So he began, and he discovered that there was a great deal to tell. He found himself describing with much brightness, and a touch of poetry, perhaps, the life of that far distant island. It was an idle, dream-like picture: glens and valleys, where the spring revelled while winter lingered reluctant to go on the mountain tops; placid waters, touched with sunset-fire, or with the tenderness of saffron tinted dawns; moors glorious with auturge, bravest colours. [illegible], too,

He spoke, too, of storms that rage upon this far-off shore; of long wild nights he had spent under an upturned boat for sheer joy in watching the anger of the foaming surf leaping up to meet the lashing, wrestling rain, and in listening to the screech of the sea-birds, heard above all the tempest. Then he described the cottage, hardly better than a hut, where he and his friend "put up" in autumn, for there was no house that went with the shootings. She seemed to see it all: the housekeeper's daughter, who had "a spine in her back," and who lay, very patient and contented, on every fine day in the little garden, where curly greens and coral fuchsias grew in contented proximity (somehow she knew—she could not have told how—that Felix was very good to this poor girl, and supplied her with books, and, perhaps, with more substantial comforts); the housekeeper herself, with her limited English and her unlimited Highland pride; all the work of the homestead, too; the ripening, watched so eagerly, of the patch of yellow c[illegible]; the anxious care with which not only the cows and sheep, but the very hens were tethered to keep their wandering feet from temptation, while this slow coining of gold went on; then, due time, and often late in the autumn, the ingathering of the harvest, when

everybody, gentle and simple, lent a willing hand.

It was perhaps a trite enough picture to those very familiar with this long-discovered land of the north-west; but to this young girl who listened, her wide innocent eyes fixed on the speaker with the most absorbed attention, it was all new and all wonderful as a land of dreams.

"Oh, I hope Bell will take me there!" she said.

"Possibly I may be there myself. I often take a run up there," he answered carelessly.

What was perhaps less wonderful than this dreamland, was the fact that the time passed with great speed while her companion talked. He had so much to say, and he took care to say it so that she should feel interested—almost compelled to attend—and that result, as we have seen, was not difficult to achieve.

She forgot altogether the part she was supposed to be taking, as a young lady making her curtsey to society. The young gentlemen who should alarm her with their flowing French and their agility in waltzing, were forgotten too; the host, if he saw her at all, had the discretion to keep these aspirants aloof. Her thoughts followed Felix into other lands, strange, wonderful countries, where one day she, too,

might wander. She was very happy: her imagination was stirred; fitful images and pleasant visions flitted before her. It was a beautiful, simple life that he described, and he seemed to be giving her the assurance that it would one day be her own. Afterwards she remembered that he had said, "Some day I should like to show you that," "Some day we shall look at this together." At the moment it had seemed very natural that he should make such proposals. It was only afterwards, when other light had been cast on them, when she was alone and had time to think, that she understood the words. Then she recoiled from them ashamed, with cheeks that burned under the accusation that to listen had been disloyal.

But as yet no illumination had come to her. She had not any eyes for the couples who now and again strayed from the ball-room to cool themselves in the long hall, and whose glances, betraying amusement, might have enlightened her. Among those who came and came again more than once was Philippa, who, with charming impartiality, was making a great many people happy, and was listening gracefully to compliments in all languages.

On one of the occasions when she wandered into the hall, her companion was the young *attaché* who had been Di's first partner. This

fickle youth was confiding everything over again to the new listener—his prospects, his position, his superior knowledge of State affairs. It pleased him to talk in French. It was the thing to do, and phrases that might be condemned as egotistical if worded in English sound beautifully modest in a foreign tongue.

"You can say so many more things; you can express such nice shades of meaning; you can make remarks that don't offend, you know," he explained. "You have travelled a great deal, and you must have felt the value of this."

"I have travelled a great deal; but it is mostly the English side of foreign life that I have seen, and my country people think that every foreigner is bound to understand the English tongue."

"Well, that's just it; you know that's just where the advantage of living abroad and knowing other languages lies. In America or England you must talk as others do; but here you can say a thing to an American or an Englishman in French, you know, a broad thing, and he takes it all for granted. He thinks it's the license of the language."

"That is a new light," said Philippa gravely. "When I want to say a broad thing I will remember that."

"Of course, everybody talks it here," this

persistent admirer of the Gallic tongue went on; "it's the court language."

"Yes," said Philippa, "I suppose so. We fondly hoped to see something of Spanish life—the romantic side of it that one reads about—the Spain of Don Quixote; but the knights I have met have not been very romantic. It is difficult to be interesting, I dare say, when you are not sure of your tenses."

"Oh, if you want to see the Spaniards at home, you will have to wait, I can tell you. They are the most inhospitable people in Europe. I've been here six months now, and I've not been inside the door of a Spanish house. They would not believe me, if I told them that in New York."

"I dare say not. Then there is no hope for me," she said, with fine gravity.

"Well, not in the upper circles, at any rate. I was disappointed at first; but I have made up my mind now that there is nothing worth regretting. I am told they never entertain. They live in a mean kind of style, anyhow."

"That is not my way," said Philippa, shaking her head. "I shall always believe that I have lost a great deal, that I have missed a splendid opportunity by not getting behind these closed doors. I don't know French so well as you,

but I remember one phrase from my school-days. I think it is Montaigne who says it: 'On voyage moins pour s'instruire que pour se désillusionner.'"

She was looking fixedly at the other end of the gallery, where a white dress, trimmed with red roses, was to be seen; but if there was any double meaning in her words, this young *attaché* was not acute enough to read it.

How long the spell that held those two, seated alone in their remote corner, might have lasted, it is impossible to say; but it was broken suddenly and completely by a sound of many footsteps. A door near them was thrown wide open, and the hall seemed all in a moment to be filled with people.

Di looked round, and, with a start, she awoke, and came back from dreamland.

"What is it?" she asked.

There was a rustle of dresses, a murmur of voices, and of low laughter, and many eyes seemed to rest upon the two who sat in conspicuous isolation.

"It's the matrons going in for supper," said Felix explaining. "I forgot they did it that way here. We'll have to wait, I suppose. It would be considered 'cheeky' if we went in with our elders, wouldn't it?"

He spoke lightly, as if he did not mind, or

wish her to mind the battery of looks, amused or indifferent, directed at them; but Di did not answer.

She, too, looked at them all a little shyly, yet with a pleasant interest in the smiling lords and rustling ladies till one pair of eyes met her own. It was Mrs. Henshaw, who passed her leaning on the arm of a decorated gentleman; she was so close that her silken train brushed Di's feet, so near that there was no mistaking the cold, almost malignant anger of her eyes.

Deonys, to whom no one was ever cold or cruel, shrunk back surprised and frightened.

"What have I done? Why should she look like that?" she questioned herself, flushing and growing pale. "Oh, what have I done!"

Had Felix seen that look, too?

"Shall we go and see what Miss Piper and her cavalier are about?" he asked, standing up and offering her his arm. "It will be cooler in there now."

She got up mechanically.

"I must go away," she said, confused and miserable. She took one step forward, not noticing his outstretched arm. She saw Miss Barbara and she went to her swiftly.

Miss Barbara, the last of the procession, stepped out of the ranks, waving away Major Gibbs with a gesture that was a command.

She strode up stern and unrelenting. A sombre, severe figure.

"What have I done?" said Di, this time audibly.

"What have you done?" Miss Barbara echoed grimly. "You have made yourself the talk of the evening. That I should have lived to hear that woman"—she indicated with a nod Mrs. Henshaw's departing skirts—"speak of you as she spoke to-night! As for him"—she glanced at Felix with an air of great and righteous wrath—"I am ashamed of myself that I ever thought well of him. Was it not enough for him to make one girl's name the gossip of the place? Must he set them talking about you, too?"

Di checked her with a little touch upon her arm.

The girl's face was pale, and her proud, tender mouth was quivering, but she said, quietly and firmly—

"If it was wrong it was my fault. Do you hear me? It was all my fault. It was because I did not understand. I did not think."

"Your fault?" Miss Barbara looked at her, still stern, but perhaps not without inward relenting. "Well, you'll have to bear it between you. It takes more than one to do most of the mischief of the world. I'm not going to measure

out which of you was most to blame. You have set people's idle, foolish tongues going, and that's enough for me."

Deonys shrank involuntarily from this hard truth; but she said in her clear, steady tones—

"You will say nothing—to him. It was my doing. I did not wish to dance. And now I am going away. I ought not to have come. I will never go to a ball again."

She left Miss Barbara before that lady could deliver herself of further rebuke or remonstrance. She walked quickly down the long hall, looking neither to right nor left, bent only on reaching solitude. At the other end of it a door suddenly opened, and Malleson appeared.

"Why, Di, I was coming to look for you," he said.

"Oh, Ralph," she said, thinking it quite natural he should be at hand to help her in her extremity," "will you take me home?"

"Home already! Are you tired? Have you danced so much? Let me look at you."

He took her by the two hands and wheeled her round under a blazing chandelier.

"It's all nonsense. You want some supper, and then we shall tread our measure together. You think I'm too venerable to dance? How do you know that I haven't been practising my steps for the last month in the privacy of my

den? You ask old Anchel if he hasn't heard the boards creaking. Come along; I'm burning to distinguish myself."

"I must go home."

She had much ado to keep her lips from trembling; she could not bring them to say anything more.

"Di," he said, smiling at her; "you are a dreadful little unbeliever. Well, come and have some supper, at any rate. I met your father just now. What do you suppose he will think if he finds you flown?"

"I don't know," she said, finding words in the urgency of her need. "Oh, Ralph, will you never understand? Let me pass. I must go. I'll go alone, if you won't take me."

Then at last he understood that some intolerable trouble was pressing down upon her, and that he was torturing her by his easy phrases.

"Has that woman——" he began impetuously, and then he checked himself. This was no time for questions.

"Come," he said simply. He led her out and wrapped her in his own great coat, which he had just taken off. Then, at last, they reached the silence of the clear, austere, starlit night.

He did not ask her any more questions, or trouble her with words at all. It was but a little way to the Preciados, and they traversed

it quickly. He went with her upstairs and into the sitting-room, where a dim light was burning. He stirred the smouldering fire, and placed her in her own little chair near it. Then he crossed to the kitchen, and roused the sleepy Pepa, moving drowsily among her pots and pans, and made her warm the coffee that was ready for Mr. Ouvry on his return.

"Look here, Pepa," he said, "I'll give you a new pañuela if you will be clever and light a fire in your mistress's room. Do you hear me? Is the coffee warm? Come, stir about, and get the room ready."

Pepa stared at the unwonted spectacle of the grave English señor, prying into odd corners and lifting the lids of her pans distractedly; but she was sensible of the magnificence of the bribe, and did her best to earn it.

Deonys paid little heed to all this fuss and bustle; she longed to be alone. It was all Malleson could do for her, this outward service, this tending of the body. It is often all that the best and most loving of us can do for another in our imperfect knowledge of an inward trouble.

She might be morbid in her sensitiveness; she might misjudge, mistake, in her inexperience; but all his soul rose up in resentment against any one who should hurt her by so

much as a look, and he left her, vowing a great anger against the disturber of her peace.

He did not go back to the ball-room. He went home to his rooms, and put on once again the shabby and familiar garment that belonged to his working hours. The dress coat of venerable cut, which he had worn so philosophically, he flung aside with something of a grim and sardonic smile. Three minutes of Mrs. St. John's reception had been enough for him.

CHAPTER X.

"A lonely spirit, unquiet."

"BUT must I really go, father?"

"You have written the letter, haven't you?"

"Yes; but I could write another." That hardly seemed to Di a sufficient argument.

"So you will, I dare say, to announce that you are on your way. I'm afraid you haven't a logical mind, my child."

Mr. Ouvry looked up from his plate with a smile. He was in an excellent humour, and nothing that even a foolish, illogical girl could say had power to disturb him.

"You have not given me one good argument why you should disappoint your cousin."

"Ah, if it were a disappointment," she said slowly. She could have given him a great many reasons, and he would have said that they were all of them more or less frivolous. It is always the strongest and most imperative motive that is never put into words.

She made no further protest. Her father, for some inscrutable reason of his own, willed that she should pay this visit to England; and she never disputed anything that he wished strongly.

"I suppose I haven't a well-regulated mind," she said, with a smile. "Padre, let me give you some more coffee."

"Oh, you will like it," he said, as he passed her his cup; "it will impress you immensely. One's first visit to London is an epoch in one's life. I wish I might be there to see how it strikes you."

"Won't you come?" she asked, with a touch of eagerness.

He shook his head.

"England is not for me," he said, with soft melancholy. "I have grown used to my exile. Do you remember that poor wretch to whom they offered his freedom, and who begged on his knees to be allowed to end his days in the Bastille? His liberty was a commodity he didn't know how to use. After thirty years of prison walls one grows to love their shelter."

"Prison walls! Our's is a very large Bastille, I think," she said, smiling. And yet she felt at moments as if this great city—the only home she had ever known—was indeed too narrow for her. The ball was a thing of the past, considered

in the light of the thick-coming gaieties that had followed, but Miss Barbara's words had scorched Deonys, and the burning wounds still ached. To her it seemed as if that night would never float away among the things that are forgotten, or remembered only at passing moments. It was always there—always present. She had made people talk about her. They had laughed and jested and made small insinuations. They had judged her, and condemned her. She hid her burning cheeks in her hands, though there was none to see. If Miss Barbara could have measured the depth of her shame, the torture of her hurt pride, she would have recoiled in amazement.

Miss Barbara, like most people who act on impulse, had already so far cooled from her first wrath as to be willing to take Di back to a measure of favour, if Di had given her the opportunity. But this she did not do. She hid herself, and saw no one. Miss Barbara, carrying her small olive branch, not to be presented, however, until she had delivered herself of a further instalment of her mind, found the girl flown. Concha, resentful and ungracious, answered the lady's execrable Spanish with contempt.

"How was she to know where the señorita had gone? Was she the child's jailer?"

Miss Barbara, being but human, resented Di's absence, and tramped downstairs with somewhat chilled ardour. The chances were, that when Di was again to be seen that carefully prepared scolding would be a little emphasized.

As for Felix, he was very speedily restored to favour. Indeed, Di tormented herself quite needlessly with picturing Miss Barbara's attitude towards him on the night of the ball.

After she had left, the young man, having a shrewd guess, perhaps, at the state of matters, came up and presented his arm with the utmost nonchalance to the offended lady.

"I see Ralph is taking care of Miss Ouvry," he said. "Miss Barbara, won't you take compassion on me, and take me to have some supper? I'm tremendously hungry."

When a young man looks at you with a smile in his eyes, and deprecates your indignation with the most charming good nature, it is impossible, at least if you are a maiden lady, to keep up a show of anger long. Miss Barbara made a valiant stand, but she had to surrender.

There never was such an attentive youth. He got her the most comfortable chair and a small table all to herself. He rushed away for her spectacles, which, after the manner of spectacles, were absent at the most important moment; he tempted her with every good

thing on the table. You would have said that it was the most delightful and congenial task to wait on this hard-featured old lady, dressed in an antique and bygone fashion, and that he had never cared to look at a girl in his life. Who could resist such blandishments?

"And will you tell me which of them it is?" she asked dryly, as he came back with the champagne; "or is it to be turn about?"

"There is only one—there never was but one," he answered earnestly.

"I thought there were two. Maybe you were trying which you liked best. Perhaps you'll let me know when you've made up your mind," she said sarcastically.

"It is made up. Miss Barbara, you must help me."

She assured him that she would promise no such thing. She was not going to spend herself to help a weather-cock to twirl with every wind that blows. Yet in her inmost heart she was triumphant. It was not Philippa, then, it was Deonys, this child of her love, whom he had chosen. She had hardly the heart to scold him for his indiscretion. But [illegible] must not be acquainted with her good [illegible]ne until she had had her misdeeds pointed had gone. Miss Barbara averred that, even if

it was an honest courtship, that was no excuse for behaviour that was "not pretty."

But as for Di, this supposed happiness that was about to be offered to her was the chief cause of her misery.

She was growing very fast in these days, and she understood now something of what Felix had meant by his words and looks. The knowledge brought her keenest pain. She wanted, above all things, to be true to Philippa. Why, then, should loyalty to Philippa all at once seem so very hard a thing?

It was to the gallery that she fled; there she could be quite sure of solitude. Mrs. Henshaw's patronage of art had ceased. Here, least of all, Felix was likely to be found. Here were only the dumb, friendly pictures, that tell you their own story and never ask for yours in return.

It was here that she had learned much of the little she knew. It was not an education after the pattern of Newnham or Girton, but it went for something, for in these echoing corridors you can hold communion with the master minds of the world.

True, she knew hardly more than the alphabet of their language. She passed fiery Goya with a shudder; Ribera's martyrdoms, and his fleshless yellow saints frightened her; there was all the pain and penance of life, and none of

its beauty or its holiness, in the faces of his wasted anchorites. She looked with great respect at Bassano—the painter of broad backs and of shining pots and pans—with some comprehension of the splendid life and movement, the gaiety of Velasquez; but it was to Bartolomé Esteban Murillo that she gave her whole heart's love. This sweet interpreter of grace and tenderness, and of rare colour, seemed to her to imprison a prayer in every canvas he touched. His "Virgin of Sorrows," with her rapt, upward gaze, appealed to her by her very humanness. She was not far-off, remote—an angel appearing for a moment out of paradise, like the madonnas of Raphael. She was but a woman, understanding the sorrows of other women, touched even while her eyes are lifted to heaven, with the woes that darken this dark earth.

It was to her the girl whispered, "You understand"; it was to her she looked for sympathy, comprehension, consolation. While Di flitted lightly day by day through the long empty galleries—smiling sometimes at the fantastic conceptions of Teniers, the dancing and piping frogs, the monsters, dwarfs, skeletons, and always the beautiful lady who, with feminine subtlety, appears now in green, now in lustrous satin, again in court-dress, with

feathers on her head, to the distraction of the sorely tempted Anthony, who peeps at her from his cave; now standing with great awe before Raphael's "Pasmo de Sicilia"—there were visitors who came, and who went away disappointed from the door of the house in the Preciados.

Felix ran up once or twice, and one day Mrs. St. John arrived to make a rare visit, but Concha shut the door on all this Parisian finery.

Mrs. St. John was more fortunate in finding the ladies in the lower house at home.

"I've been to see that little girl," she said, "but she was out. I am dying to ask her what Miss Barbara said to her that night, you know, at our ball. I couldn't resist taking Miss Barbara to have a peep at them in the hall; it was as good as a play to see her face. She was downright mad with her. We think nothing of that sort of thing at home, but you English are so dreadfully proper, and so stiff. You make prudes of your girls."

She was seated in Mrs. Henshaw's rocking-chair, and she tilted it back with a laugh.

"I prefer that my daughter should be called a prude rather than a flirt," said Mrs. Henshaw, with great stateliness.

"Well, now, we don't think much of a flirtation, you know. It comes natural. And it

seems to me, if you curb young people too much, you just make them sly. You force them to make appointments about which their mammas know nothing." She glanced at Philippa from under her eyelashes. "I don't think there was an atom of harm in those two sitting together the whole evening. He's what I call a brilliant young man. He's more like an American. I'd listen to him for hours myself, if he asked me."

"He is a delightful young man," said Philippa calmly.

"And you're not jealous?" Mrs. St. John turned to her with a quick laugh. "Now, if it was me, I'd be burning with jealousy. I'd let every one know it."

"That is one of the disadvantages of being English," said Philippa lightly. "We haven't your fine frankness. We can't express ourselves with the same charming freedom."

"Well, I was always frank. You may laugh, but you are jealous all the same, aren't you?"

"Oh yes. Concealment, like a worm i' the bud, is feeding on my damask cheek. I'm a good actor, you see."

"Well, I always said that of you." Mrs. St. John put out one pretty foot and looked contemplatively at it with her head on one side.

"Philippa, you forget yourself," said Mrs. Henshaw with great dignity. "Of whom, pray, need my daughter be jealous?" She turned to her guest. "We make every allowance for difference of national feeling, but permit me to say that in England we do not make use of such expressions. We consider them not in good taste—not nice."

"In fact, we have dropped the word out of our dictionaries," said Philippa, smiling; "we don't know what it means. I am sorry to fall short of your expectations, but the truth is, Di and I are excellent friends."

"Well, I declare!" Mrs. St. John rose, and held out her beautifully gloved hand. "You English are a mystery to me. I suppose it's because you are a dying race—that's what Mr. St. John says—that you are so cold-blooded."

"That must be it. People's feelings get blunted as they grow old."

"Well, you'll tell her that I came to see her, any way?"

"Oh yes, I will tell her. I'm going to have tea with her to-night."

"Philippa, what did you mean by talking like that?" said her mamma, when Mrs. St. John had rustled away.

"It was she who talked 'like that.' She is

epitomized American, double-distilled essence of the States. I wonder what such people are made for, unless it is to point a moral."

"She is extremely unladylike."

"I should use a stronger word."

"I hope you won't copy her manners. If it were not for her position here—and how she got it, I'm sure I don't know. But that was not what I meant."

"If you mean that I was rude to her, she did not discover it. She is as invulnerable as—as Achilles, wasn't it?"

"Don't make classical allusions; it sounds so pedantic."

"I'm not likely to err in that way," said Philippa demurely, "for my stock of them is very meagre. Achilles was a lucky hit. Was that what you meant to warn me against, mamma?"

"You know quite well what I mean, though you try to beg the question."

"Yes, I think I know." She looked straight into her mother's uneasy eyes, her own flashing with sudden fire. "You mean that I am to join in this foolish, wicked talk about that poor little girl upstairs; that I am to shake my head over her—*I!*"

"It was extremely bad taste, to say the least of it; and a forward, bold girl, must expect

people to talk of her. I don't blame any one who would take advantage of such behaviour. Gentlemen think it amusing for the time; but they despise girls who carry them on. They have no real respect for them."

"Every one respects Di. I won't hear a word against her."

"It is very sad to see how family traits descend," Mrs. Henshaw went on, occupied with her own train of thought—"heredity, you know—a most interesting study; I have a firm belief in it. You saw how she left me the moment we entered the ball-room, and sought out that ridiculous Miss Piper?"

"Is that heredity?" said Philippa innocently.

"I for one could never countenance such extravagance. Why, that blue satin must have cost at least a guinea a yard! And to choose her, instead of me—not even a married woman. But I always had my misgivings, when I saw how like the girl is to her mother. I am not often mistaken, and now, you see, the taint is coming out."

Philippa laughed, as she always did, at her mother's inconsequent speeches. This scrappy way of doing her thinking aloud had its droll side.

"I don't know what the mother may have

done," she said, "but if Di is like her, she must have been wholly sweet and good."

"Ah! you will never know, never! I have kept my sorrows to myself. I have never troubled you with them"—she spoke with a touch of real pathos—"and I want to save you from suffering as I suffered. You should remember that when I ask you to give up anything, it is because I am thinking only of your good. And you ought to try and please me, when I tell you it is you I am thinking of." Her voice grew eager and almost shrill.

"But not to give up Di," Philippa answered quickly, earnest now, too; "that would only do me harm."

Her heart fired up, made its passionate claim to truth and faithfulness. She felt instinctively that her safety lay in these. At the moment she meant them wholly.

Mrs. Henshaw said nothing more. With all her slovenliness of speech she knew where to stop. She knew, for instance, never to introduce Felix Chester's name into any discussion of Di's conduct. Some instinct warned her that there would be danger in the topic.

Philippa, hot to prove her loyalty to friendship, went at once up the higher flight of stairs.

"Oh, Concha, she is always out now," she said, showing her disappointment in her mobile

face. "I will come back in the evening—to-night," she repeated, in her stammering Spanish.

The old serving woman's face beamed with friendliness. Nobody could resist this gracious young lady. She nodded her head, spread out her hands, shrugged her shoulders; it was a brilliant pantomime. Philippa laughed, calling out, as she ran downstairs again, that she would return—at night.

An hour later, while she was busy twisting together some scraps of lace and ribbon for the adornment of Mrs. Henshaw's head, that lady slipped out to take a walk.

She went away almost furtively, as if she feared to be questioned or recalled; she came back triumphant, important, the very sweep of her skirts was complacent.

Philippa sat in her low, straight-backed seat by the window, her laces and flowers scattered all about her. She was humming to herself a low French air with a sad refrain, but her voice was gay.

"J'avais donc dix-huit ans! j'étais donc plein de songes!"

"Look here, my child, I have a charming surprise for you." Mrs. Henshaw paused at the table in the middle of the room and searched her reticule for a little package. "He put them up in paper, he is so neat. I like to see

neatness in a man. Tickets for the Zarzuela. You know you have wanted all winter to go there, so this fits in delightfully, as we have no engagement."

Philippa glanced up, but she continued her careless song—

"O temps de rêverie, et de force et de grâce!
* * * * * *
Vouloir tout de la vie, amour, puissance et gloire!
Etre pur, être fier, être sublime et croire
A toute pureté!"

"It is an excellent piece," Mrs. Henshaw continued, a little more sharply. "He told me the name. Let me see; what was it? Oh yes, 'Dreams of Gold,'—a pretty name; something classic, you know, and with a moral. I dare say quite proper, or he would not have invited us."

"Who is he?" Philippa asked still negligently, bent on the nice adjustment of a rose.

"Did I not tell you? Major Gibbs is going with us. He is really very attentive."

"Oh, very attentive. That is a reward for the cake and wine."

"And—I believe Mr. Chester is to be there too. So, you see, we shan't be dull."

Philippa broke off her singing sharply.

"You asked him?" She looked straight at her mother.

"I mentioned that we were going."

Mrs. Henshaw left the room without meeting the glance of her daughter's serious eyes.

That evening Deonys had no guests except Ralph, who came often. He found her busy sewing, as he always did now. The house was very quiet; there was no sound of laughter from the balcony below.

They did not talk much while he smoked. Di was entirely silent about the past. She never alluded to the night of the ball. Malleson was left to guess at the source of her distress. Once he asked her, awkwardly enough, if she had spoken much with Mrs. Henshaw on that occasion.

"You were under her wing, weren't you?" he questioned her with apparent carelessness.

"No," she said, looking up at him quietly. "I sat with Miss Piper—at first. I never spoke to Mrs. Henshaw all evening."

"You haven't had a passage of arms with her, have you?" he asked, playfully. "I live in the fear of that myself, and, as I know I should get the worst of it, I keep out of her way."

"No," she answered again; but she gave no further explanation.

Then he knew that he was to ask her no questions. She would not make his desire to help her easy by any confessions.

On this night, as on others, she spoke eagerly of the chances of war, and of coming trouble. For love is not the only passion of life, and in these early February days the air was full of strange omens of disaster.

CHAPTER XI.

"Ay, every inch a king."

One morning Di leaned out of her window, and knew that the spring had come.

The air that met her softly as she opened her casement whispered the secret. It had lingered on the wide plains, brown no longer, but brave with tenderest, most vivid green. There were larks rising joyously with rapturous singing from the young wheat; the almond trees by the Manzanares had made haste to put out their pink blossoms, and were bending down to look at themselves in the clear water; the air thereabouts was sweet with the scent of hidden violets.

She needed no second summons. There were to be no pictures painted by man's hand for her this day, no confining walls while the spring was waiting to greet her, lurking in the alleys of the Campo del Moro. "I am coming," she said, nodding gravely, and she went and fetched her hat, and ran down the many steps.

Mr. Ouvry, for a wonder, had risen early, and called for his coffee while she still slept. She had slept late, and this was her waking.

In the Puerta del Sol there was a great gathering of people, thronging the side walks and the centre of the great square. She stood an instant, surprised, hesitating whether to try and penetrate the crowd to reach the Calle Major. Then she saw that the militia were on duty, that the windows of the Home Office bristled with soldiers. While she stood, uncertain whether to go back or forward, some one touched her on the arm. She looked up, startled, into Felix Chester's face.

"I was coming for you," he said. "You ought not to be out alone."

This was, indeed, all he said in words, but his eyes were saying, as plainly as possible, how glad he was to see her again.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"Haven't you heard? Listen. You will hear everybody chattering about it. They say the king has abdicated."

"Abdicated!" she echoed, looking up at him blankly.

"So they say. I'm afraid there's some truth in it."

"But will he go away—will they make him go away?" she asked, still bewildered.

"I suppose so. I believe some sanguine spirits proposed to establish a republic with Amadeo as president, but I rather think he would decline the honour. I don't suppose there will be any row. They can't even achieve a decent revolution here."

"But what made him do it?" she asked, thinking of her king.

"I can't make it out. I fancy nobody quite understands the muddle. They say Serrano and Sagasta wished him to decree the suspension of the Habeas Corpus, or its equivalent here. There is a rumour of a disturbance in the corps of artillery, too; but the real fact of the matter is, he can't manage them. They've been too much for him. As it was once said of Frenchmen, 'Gods are required to govern Spaniards.'"

"They have treated him shamefully!" she said indignantly.

"I thought you would like to see something of what is going on. We are all at Ralph's rooms. I came to fetch you." He drew her arm gently within his own as he spoke. "I haven't seen you for such a long time," he said. "Not since that night of Mrs. St. John's reception. I called once or twice, but Mr. Ouvry was always out."

"He goes out a great deal."

"And you, too. We did not fancy that our

next meeting was to be on the edge of a storm! What sensational paragraphs old Ralph will make out of it!"

She did not answer. This sudden assumption of power and authority troubled her. She had thought so often of their next meeting; she had meant to be so quiet, so calmly neutral, so even distant, perhaps, showing to others, with a touch of pride, that she could demean herself with discretion; and here he was guiding and protecting her, making a path for her through the close-gathered people, jealously caring for her; alluding lightly to that last time, too, as if it were all a matter of course!

"I think I had better go home," she said, making a faint resistance.

"I'm afraid I can't let you do that," he answered gravely, "unless you will let me stay with you."

A moment before he had been scorning the thought of danger; and now, all at once, it seemed as if there were tremendous possibilities of harm everywhere out of the circle of his presence.

"But Concha and Pepita ——"

"Oh, they are Spaniards and fierce Republicans, no doubt. That's quite another matter," he assured her eagerly. "They are all right; they can look after themselves."

"I can't understand it," she said, yet she let herself be led on. Was it all a dream?

"You will find everybody in Ralph's rooms. They seem to think him a tower of strength, dear old man. Miss Piper is there, too. She has been asking for you."

Malleson had lately changed his quarters, and his rooms looked out upon the Cortes, thus affording a good view of the centre of interest. It was but a little way to reach them, but it took a long time to make a path through the crowd, here very dense. Felix struggled manfully, and took the utmost care of her, receiving all the pressure on his own broad shoulders.

At last he plunged into a side street, and leading his companion by devious and narrow ways, they at length reached the house, and entered it by a back door.

"Here we are at last," he cried. "And how we shall get out again is a question. You are not very tired, I hope? I'm afraid it was a rough walk for you."

"I am not at all tired," she answered, making haste to ascend the steps.

He followed her in silence till they reached the highest floor; but, before he knocked, he turned to her, and said hesitatingly—

"I wished to ask you something. It was so difficult to talk out there."

"Yes?"

"Surely you are not angry with me?" he said abruptly. "I have not vexed you, have I? I have been hoping to see you all these weeks——"

"But I was out, you know," she said gently, helping him. "When the weather is good I am out a great deal. And you have not offended me. How could you do that?"

"I have not seen you since that evening. I thought it was a splendid evening. There have been lots of balls since, but I didn't go to any of them. I didn't care about it."

"No?" She looked at him with her grave, direct glance. "Don't you think we had better go in?"

"If you wish it." He made haste to knock. He was a little disappointed. She was kind; but it was not like the last time.

When she entered the room she found that indeed everybody was there.

Her father was standing with Major Gibbs in one window, Mrs. Henshaw and Miss Piper shared the other. Mrs. Henshaw was seated, her feet thrust forward on a stool; the maiden lady's flounces occupied but a modest corner. Ralph, heedless of the chattering company, was scribbling busily at a table in the centre of the room, all littered with papers. He

looked up with a smile, and nodded as the door opened, and they passed in. The girl's face was grave, and a little proud as she came forward. Then Philippa stepped suddenly out from some unseen corner, and clasped her round the waist. Even Mrs. Henshaw extended the tips of her carefully gloved fingers. Miss Piper's greeting was, as always, effusive. It seemed to Di as if she were suddenly taken back into favour, as if it were tacitly agreed in the face of this new excitement that the past was to be forgotten.

"Ah, Di," her father said, looking round and speaking pleasantly, "I was coming to fetch you. This is something for you to see – something for you young people to remember."

"I remember when Queen Isabella was driven away," said Miss Piper, coming forward with her little contribution to the talk, "and Queen Christina, you remember her, don't you, Major Gibbs? Dear Robert had such a poor opinion of her. He used to say ——"

"Yes, yes, *I* remember," said the major loftily, sweeping away these worthless reminiscences with a wave of his hand.

"You forget, my dear madam, that I am the oldest English inhabitant of Madrid. I was here before any of you. I've seen you all come, all of you."

"Oh, you have had fine privileges!" cried Philippa. "What a great deal of history you must have seen."

"A little, a little; I could tell you some things." The soldier pursed his lips and drew himself up.

"What I used to wish most for was that I had lived in the days of the French Revolution."

"Philippa, I am horrified!" cried her mamma. "Think of the martyred king!"

"Oh, but he lost his head before they took it off, as somebody says. I don't want anything to happen to Di's king; but if they call this a revolution it ought to be a real one, and not a sham. Why don't they sing the 'Marseillaise?' They have no spirit, and there ought to be tumbrils thundering over the streets."

"My dear Miss Philippa!" cried Miss Piper aghast.

"They won't touch the crowned heads here," said Felix reassuringly. "Amadeo will go off comfortably with a first-class ticket to Italy, and they will put a Republic in his place, and nobody will know the difference."

"I don't know," said Philippa; "I think it is cruel of you to deprive me of a new emotion in that matter-of-fact way. Come here, Di, and look down and tell me if those faces don't belie his words."

Di went forward silently. It was a very quiet throng that she looked down on—a sombre crowd, hardly relieved by any touches of colour. The faces were for the most part turned towards the House of Congress, where a momentous debate was going on. It was strange to think that there, a stone's throw off, behind those walls a nation's fate was hanging in the balance.

For a moment no one spoke, and the scratching of Ralph's pen was very audible. The people—a wide sea of them, stretching as far as eye could reach up and down the broad street—were very patient and undemonstrative, but underneath this quiet exterior, turbulent passions lay hidden, which any moment might set free. It was impossible not to think a little seriously of the issues of the next few hours.

Ralph suddenly threw down his pen and rose.

"I must go out," he said, gathering his papers hastily together. "Pray make yourselves as comfortable as you can. Felix"—he tossed him his keys—"you look after the ladies, will you, and get them something to eat. You'll have to forage for yourself, for old Anchel has absconded."

"All right; we'll look after ourselves."

"But will you not be in danger?" Philippa

asked. "I haven't Mr. Chester's sublime faith in the peaceable intentions of that crowd."

"Danger! no," said Ralph. But his smile was for the anxious look in Di's eyes. "I'll have to use my elbows, that's all. It isn't a moment to study politeness." He nodded to them all and left the room.

"Ah, he speaks lightly," said Mrs. Henshaw, shaking her head; "but I am not to be blinded. I am prepared for the worst, the very worst. My poor Philippa enjoys the excitement, she is so young; but I tell her we may return to a blighted, wrecked home." This sentence sounded so well that she repeated it, folding her gloved hands together. "I wanted to take refuge at the British Embassy, but Major Gibbs pointed out that this was nearer. I think, between ourselves, he is a little jealous of the impression we made on dear Lady Louisa," she whispered cautiously. "Very weak and silly, as you say, my dear Miss Piper; but I am indulgent to little weaknesses, and so we came here instead."

"Ah, he is always so kind, Mr. Malleson," said the little lady, glowing under the unusual mark of confidence. "I thought of him at once, he is so safe! I brought away the miniatures," she said, showing a little parcel under her cloak. "I have nothing else of any value. I urged Miss Barbara to fly with me. I'm sure they

could have brought Mrs. Gordon on a mattress, you know, or a shutter. Don't they carry people often on shutters? But she said it was cowardly to run away. She is very brave," she said with a sigh; "and then they have so much silver plate."

"I don't think it is brave to ignore danger," said her companion, as if she were uttering a moral truism. "There is Blake, now, she insisted on remaining behind, after she knew that we were safe. It is wonderful what an affection the dear woman has for me. I believe she would give up her life for mine if one did that sort of thing nowadays. Dear me! are the gentlemen going to desert us?"

"We will return, my dear madam; we will protect you," said the major gallantly, retreating behind Mr. Ouvry to the door as he spoke. "You have nothing to fear. You are safe under our care."

"Pooh!" said Felix to his companions at the window; "his valour won't be put to the proof. Look at the sky; there will be no barricades to-day."

"They say the Toledo gate is barricaded," said Di.

She looked up as she spoke. The early promise of the day had fled; the spring, too, had taken flight from this turbulent, passion-stirred city.

The sky above the crowd was dull and leaden; the air heavy with the promise of storm.

"It's the Duke of Torre they are afraid of, isn't it?" Felix asked. "He is too wise to stir till the sun shines. This gloom will quench his ardour. Who ever heard of a revolution prospering under an east-wind rain?"

"You want to go, too," said Philippa, turning to him. She had seen him cast wistful looks at the throng beneath. "Don't mind us; I know you are longing to be down there. A man is never happy unless he is in the very heart of every crowd that gathers. We can do without him—can't we, Di?"

"Oh yes."

"Well, if you are not afraid for five minutes," he said laughing. "You are sure you won't be uneasy?"

He looked at Di as he spoke, but it was Philippa who assured him that he would not be missed.

Di's thoughts were full of sad perplexity. She was dwelling much on the brave king for whom she felt so loyal a love; but she had thoughts to spare, too, for things that touched her more nearly. She felt a little hurt and sore. It seemed to her Mrs. Henshaw had no right to judge and to pardon her, to extend, or to withdraw her approval in this arbitrary fashion.

She had done her no wrong. Then Miss Barbara's words, never long absent, rushed back into her mind, and overwhelmed her with a burning sense of shame. She wished Felix had left her alone to the peace and solitude she had learned to prize; she wished at that moment fervently that his sunny presence had never crossed her path to make duty hard.

The girls stood for a little while without speaking, after he left them. They had seen him emerge in the street below, but had quickly lost him in the throng.

Presently Philippa laid her hands lightly on Di's shoulders. She shivered a little under the old familiar touch. "I could not do without you," Philippa whispered, bending her cheek down to the brown head. "I sent him to fetch you."

"You!"

After that one surprised word, Di said nothing at all for what to both seemed a long time. She could not bring herself to speak. Then she turned and looked up with clear grave eyes into Philippa's face.

"I never meant to harm you," she said.

"No, I know that."

"You may trust me—always," said Di, still simply and with perfect gentleness.

"Yes," said Philippa hastily; "and Di"—the blue eyes fell before the grey ones—"I ought

to tell you, whatever mamma may say, I have no real claim——"

"Di, my dear, I have hardly spoken to you," said Miss Piper, fluttering up; "not since that night. I thought you would think it so odd, my sitting all evening with a strange gentleman; but he was a friend of Robert's, you know. I wanted to tell you, but I lost sight of you among the dancers."

"It is a great pleasure to meet an old friend," said Di smiling. "I am glad you enjoyed yourself."

"It was most fortunate about the dress," Miss Piper rejoined, in that mysterious undertone she loved to adopt. "One would wish, of course, to make a good impression on an old friend of the family. I brought it with me for safety—pinned in towels. I hid it behind the sofa, you know, in case the gentlemen should think it an odd parcel, and ask what it was. Think if the mob should break into our houses! I should not like a Spanish woman of the people to wear it and trail it on the streets."

"No, indeed," said Di laughing; "but I hope it won't come to that. Concha won't let them steal any of my dresses, I know."

"We cannot tell, my dear, we are living in sad times. I was quite uneasy about you till Mr. Chester offered to go for you."

"You should have come with us, Di; but we were whisked off by the impetuous major without a moment to think. We left Blake in a panic of packing."

"I overslept myself, that was how I was so late in hearing what everybody else knew." She did not add that she had lain awake through all the earlier hours of the night, too full of troubled thoughts to rest.

Felix was the first of the gentlemen to return. He came in laden with parcels, and wearing an air of triumph.

"Now, I call that clever," he said brightly. "I've only lost one. Let me see-- hallo! the salad's gone, too! I can tell you it was a pretty scrimmage—like running a blockade."

"And now we are ready to stand a siege," said Philippa, "to judge by the extent of your purchases."

"I was rather sceptical about old Ralph's larder, to tell the truth," he answered, laughing; "it is apt to be in the condition of Mother Hubbard's cupboard. Perhaps, if you wouldn't mind helping me, I'm not very skilful at laying out a table——"

"Di and I will be waitresses. You go and talk to mamma." She took Di's hand in her own. The close clasp seemed to seal in silence the words spoken and unspoken.

"Here come the gentlemen," said Mrs. Henshaw, from her post at the window, "and Mr. Malleson, too. I wonder if he has brought us any news?"

But he had nothing new to tell. The debate, which had lasted stormily through many hours, was still going on; the royal colours still floated over the palace.

"Some lunch? That's right. This sort of thing makes one hungry," said Ralph. "Why, Felix, I didn't know I was so rich." He surveyed the well-filled table with surprise. "And flowers, too!"

"Hear him!" said Felix derisively. "Why, man, you had nothing but some tinned soup in your precious larder!"

"Well, we may as well have it hot," Ralph answered philosophically. "Give me that knife, and I'll open the cans. Won't that fire burn, Di? Let me try; I'll show you the shifts a forlorn bachelor is put to." He lifted a newspaper from the table, and held it before the grate.

"It is burning now; take care you don't set the paper on fire. Ralph," she said softly, looking up at him as she knelt on the rug, "do you think he will really go?"

"It is only a question of hours; his star has set."

"Why must it be?"

"He would break his coronation oath if he stayed."

"Then it is right? I am glad," she said with kindling eyes.

"Yes, your hero has come out of it very well, Di," he said, smiling at her earnest face. "Nothing in his reign becomes him like the laying down of his sceptre. He has done the only thing a manly man could do. He knows when he is beaten."

"Then he is a true king!" she said proudly.

It was wonderful how glad this little talk made her, how it lifted her for the time above her own little vexations. She was proud of her hero, as Ralph had called him. It mattered less what that knot of men there behind those silent walls, should do or decree, since he—her king—had done what was right.

It was a lively meal, in spite of the cloud that might be hanging over their heads, ready to burst at any moment. Malleson, restless and excited, went off again after a hurried mouthful, but Felix acted host to perfection, and waited gaily on them all. He could not but notice the pleased light on Di's face. What had happened to make her so glad, he wondered a little wistfully. Philippa intercepted his glance.

"I know where Di has been hiding all this

time," she said. "I made her confess. She has been haunting the picture gallery."

"Very improving," said Mrs. Henshaw dryly. "I should prefer the Atocha. There's nothing more disconcerting than the way the people in the paintings stare at you."

"It seems to me it is all the other way," Felix struck in; "and that there's something uncanny in the pains they take to avoid looking at you. There isn't a St. Sebastian among them all, though he is stuck full of arrows, who so much as claims your pity by a glance. The madonnas, of course, don't know of your existence. Bassano's people turn their backs on you."

"My chief wonder is, what they all do when we are gone," said Philippa. "Do they come down out of their frames and walk about, and discuss us and criticise our criticisms? What a queer sight it would be—Goya's peasants and thieves side by side with Titian's kings and Ribera's martyrs!"

"Equality and fraternity with a vengeance!"

Thus they talked, idly avoiding politics, unless it were the major, who had been silently busy with his knife and fork until now, and who proclaimed loudly his detestation of a beggarly Republic, and his adhesion to the Alfonsist party. "The place won't be fit for a person to live in," he said.

"Poor young man!" sighed Miss Piper. "To think that he should have to go, like Isabella and Christina. But Queen Christina, she was a wicked woman, I'm afraid."

"She was a fool, ma'am," said the major hotly. "Women ought to be debarred from occupying the throne."

"It would be the women who reigned all the same," said Philippa archly. "The wisest kings have always consulted their wives."

"They may reign and welcome," said the soldier, making her a fine bow, "so long as they don't govern."

Mr. Ouvry ate sparingly; he quoted Horace softly.

"Falernian, did you say?" Mrs. Henshaw asked graciously. "I don't know that kind of wine. Yes, let me just taste it. I'm afraid our dear Mr. Chester has been very extravagant."

"This is only Val de Peñas," said Felix with admirable gravity. "Let me fill your glass."

"It was so nice of you to remember the flowers." She turned to him with a smile on her handsome lips. "If I have a weakness it is for flowers, especially in winter."

"They are rather poor, don't you think?" he answered, looking doubtfully at the spring blossoms. "I'd like to have got better ones

(Di had arranged them), but I thought myself in luck to get any to-day. I expected to find the market deserted; but patriotism goes for nothing, seemingly, when there is a chance of making a bargain. I believe a Spaniard would haggle with you over an ochavito if he were dying."

"I think your flower-seller was quite right," said Philippa, looking up—there was a touch of gay defiance about her to-day—"kings and queens seem to be cheap here, and one must live."

"Kings, eh?" Major Gibbs grew purple in the face. "Alfonso is the only legitimate heir to the throne. As for that prating demagogue over there——" But the things the major found to say about the brilliant orator, who was perhaps at that moment swaying the hearts of all who listened to him within the white walls of the Cortes, are too dreadful to be recorded.

They all rose, as if by one impulse, from the table, when this muttering thunder ceased for a moment. The major's cheeks were a deep, dull red; his hand shook as he poured himself out a glass of wine. Little Miss Piper shivered with maidenly horror at the robust, unvarnished language in which he clothed his sentiments.

Mrs. Henshaw, who felt herself to be playing

the part of hostess, looked in front of her with a neutral gaze. Di glanced at her father. He was tracing the pattern of the table-cloth absently with a delicate finger-tip. There was a smile, perhaps a little lofty and contemptuous, about his well-cut lips; he was a man whose opinions it was difficult to arrive at, since he knew very well the value of silence. Malleson had a way of saying, with a shrug, that when you did get at them you were hardly rewarded; you found them tepid, and about as palatable as cold tea. Whatever his political creed may have been, he did not choose to avow it, and the angry soldier had the field to himself.

He had now, by some occult process, arrived at the Peninsular war, and was delivering a panegyric on British valour. Everybody was relieved when Felix, taking advantage of a momentary pause, proposed that they should go out and see how matters were progressing. There were always some scraps of intelligence to be gleaned at the street corners or the cafés.

"Oh, take me with you," cried Philippa, starting up. "I see ever so many women in the crowd. I'll carry old Anchel's basket, if you like. I'll tie my head up in a handkerchief, like a woman of the people."

Suiting the action to the word, she unloosed

a blue silk scarf that she wore, and, folding it cornerwise, knotted it under her chin.

"Now, isn't the disguise complete? Behold me, Citoyenne Philippa!"

"Perfect," said Felix. "Are you prepared to take the consequences?"

"Nonsense! Philippa," said her mamma sharply. "You know you can't go out. Take that handkerchief off."

"There really is no danger. It may be a little rough for a lady, perhaps; but, as for danger——" Mr. Ouvry lifted his delicate eyebrows with a supercilious smile.

"Now, mamma, do you hear? When Mr. Ouvry says it, you will believe. If it had been you, you know," she said confidentially to Felix, "I should never have been allowed to go. We are too young; and to be young is to be at once set down as foolish and indiscreet. But when age and wisdom side with you——"

"All right, I hope you'll win. And I'll take care that you have a good time of it. We might smuggle you into the café, I dare say. They are doing a splendid trade there to-day."

"Let her go," said the major suddenly, presenting himself as a new ally. "If that rascal gets his way, etc., etc."

But, while he was speaking, Felix had gone

across the room to the window where Di was standing alone, a little apart.

"You will go with us?" he asked, and his voice was anxious and pleading. "If you will trust me, I will take the greatest care. There is no danger, and, as your father says, it is a thing to see."

"No," she said, shrinking a little within the shadow of the curtain, "thank you, I'd much rather stay here."

He turned away disappointed.

When Philippa willed anything she generally secured it; and permission was at length given her to go with the gentlemen, but not as a "woman of the people."

"Are you not coming, Di?" said her father, looking from one girl to the other. "It might amuse you, my child."

"No, father. I—I am tired," she said, hoping that he would not be disappointed. "And you will come back, to take me home. You will be quite sure to come back, padre?"

Certainly, he would return, he assured her; in an hour or two, at most, it would be quite an easy matter to cross the square.

"I am not so sanguine," said Mrs. Henshaw, when they had all left. "I am prepared for the worst. It is right to look things calmly in the face; and the major is a man of large

experience. One puts less weight, you know, on a civilian's opinion. Still, I trust our young friends may be right for war, civil war, is a dreadful thing."

"I think the major is very coarse. Such expressions! He quite alarmed me."

Miss Piper was still blushing and quivering under the angry soldier's thrusts.

"One needs to understand the military manner," said Mrs. Henshaw instructively. "My great-uncle was a distinguished officer—our family has always taken high rank in the profession. I had a cousin, too. He was a colonel in the Indian army, and such a handsome man!"

"The Pipers have always chosen the Church. My brother Robert——"

"Ah! yes, so I have heard." Mrs. Henshaw civilly stemmed this stream of reminiscences at the outset. "If you will excuse me, my dear Miss Piper, I think I will lie down for a little. I dare say Mr. Malleson's sofa is very hard; but one must not grumble. And one cannot tell in what dreadful way one's rest may be disturbed before long. I cannot be so hopeful as others."

While she lay in dignified repose, Di busied herself in softly removing the remains of the meal. It gave her pleasure to set the room in

fair order, and to restore something of the look of home to the forlorn, untidy bachelor quarters. Ralph's ornaments were few — some trifles picked up in the Rastro, and one or two relics of a long-forgotten home in England, were tossed about among the books and papers in careless confusion. There was an immense array of pipes, which she dusted with care. She looked at the scattered papers with great respect. What fine things was not Ralph perhaps at this moment writing for the benefit of the English people, who would receive the great news printed in big capitals, with their coffee and toast next morning. She felt herself envying those English readers for whom Ralph's pen was supposed to be flying, while all the time that young man was offering libations to the new Republic, with his brethren of the press in the Café Fornos.

"I am only shutting my eyes. I am not asleep, my dear, if you wish to talk to me," Miss Piper whispered from her corner.

Di looked at her old friend with a smile. She was nodding and recovering herself with a start; then again her meek head, with its wonderful garland of faded flowers, would droop upon her breast. Di went on tiptoe and fetched an ancient, battered cushion, that Ralph was wont to thump when he wanted to be very

emphatic, and put it gently behind the sleeper. She drew down the blind. The shadows were lengthening, and the room was dark.

When her task was finished, she went to the window and knelt down, leaning her forehead against the pane. The day was grey and bleak, but the threatened rain had not fallen. She was so high above the crowd, still standing patient in close ranks, that she could distinguish no individual sounds, only an indistinct, continuous murmur. Both ladies slept, and there was great stillness in the room.

Di gave herself up to thoughts that were sad as the sombre, brooding sky. Her imagination hovered about the palace, about the sick queen, and her laughing, unconscious children; the king who had failed to govern, and who was brave enough to own that he had failed. Her heart was stirred as she thought of it—the pain and the sacrifice, the renunciation of cherished hopes. She seemed to understand it all so well to-day—to hold the key to all suffering in her hand. For had not she, too, abdicated, given up that which might have been her crown and kingdom?

"I could have learned to love him too," she whispered. She shut her eyes, and for a little while the crowd outside was forgotten—the banished king preparing sadly for departure—

while she took farewell of a dream that promised to be sweet. It was only a moment's lingering about the threshold of a life that might have been, but was not to be, for she had given her word. "You may trust me," she had said, and she meant it wholly.

Perhaps she slept, for one sleeps through the keenest grief when one is young. At least, she came back with a great start to this work-a-day world. The room was perfectly dark, but there invaded it suddenly a great hoarse sound of shouting. She sprang up bewildered. Then the door opened, and some one cried out, "What! all in the dark?" And there was laughter and some confusion while a light was struck, and the ladies were discovered protesting indignantly that they had not slept.

Malleson was there, and Felix. Philippa tossed off her hat.

"There was nothing to see. It was a dreadful scramble, that was all. Listen. They are shouting again."

"What is it, padre? What has happened?" Di went over to him and took him by the arm.

"The Republic is proclaimed. That is their way of expressing satisfaction."

"And Don Amadeo, he will hear them. Oh, how cruel and fickle they can be!" she said indignantly.

"He'll be busy packing; he won't hear them. The major isn't here, is he? Felix looked round with an air of comic relief. "Won't his rage be colossal!"

"A Republic! Dear me! It will be like America."

"Mrs. St. John will patronize us, mamma," said Philippa, with a laugh. "She will tell us how to behave. Since things are settled, we can go home, and relieve poor Blake, if you like."

"Settled!" cried Mrs. Henshaw, unwilling to be driven in this unceremonious fashion from her Cassandra-like attitude. "I think the danger has only just begun. Don't you hear the noise they are making?"

"They are dispersing all the same," said Felix, shutting the window. "The street will be clear in a few minutes. "It is the tamest affair to call a revolution. You'll have to do a lot of padding to make anything of it, Ralph."

"You boys know so much. You had better try your hand at it," said Ralph grimly.

"We might draw up a sensational account among us. I've heard it profanely hinted that fiction and journalism are not distantly related. Miss Henshaw, will you lend us your imagination?"

Philippa shook her head.

"My spirits have been too much lowered. I wish I had stayed with you, Di. I think we had better go home and unpack our clothes, mamma, unless Blake has sent them off already."

"No, you really must not go," said Ralph energetically. "You must all stay and have some tea. Let us pledge the Republic in a social cup. You don't know what a pleasure it is to me to have company, or you would not grudge me this last hour."

And thus this eventful day ended.

* * * * *

It might be a tame thing as revolutions go, but Di thought there was another word that could be better applied to it as she sat looking out on the Puerta.

The Republic was twenty-four hours old. It was known to every one now how, early in the morning that sad little procession had gone out from the palace to return no more. The sick queen, surrounded by her weeping ladies, carried in the king's arms to the carriage; he himself —Di's *ré galantuomo*—brave, calm, uncomplaining to the last. It was impossible to hear the touching story of fallen royalty unmoved.

There was a great illumination in the plaza; lights quivered and danced in every window, on the faces of the animated, laughing people, on the arms of the militia picketed at every

corner. The mists of yesterday had passed; a little wind had risen, driving away the clouds, and fluttering the republican banner that rose bravely from the Home Office; there were bright-coloured colgoduras hanging from every balcony—each householder vied with his neighbour in this sort of finery—laughter and music, and the glitter of arms, while the Italian fugitives were far away on the distant frontier.

"Ah," said Mr. Ouvry, coming up behind his daughter, and glancing over her shoulder, "Le roi est mort; vive le roi!"

CHAPTER XII.

"And, therefore, if to love can be desert,
I am not all unworthy."

There is a certain order of mind that finds a great satisfaction in proving its instincts and forewarnings to have been right.

This pleasure Mrs. Henshaw enjoyed in a large measure during the early days of the young republic. It was undoubtedly an uncomfortable time for those who love order; who do not care to be agitated by continual hints of near trouble, and who like to have their letters and papers served with their morning coffee.

Each day brought fresh outbreaks of the social distemper that everywhere invaded the unhappy country. Mr. Malleson might laugh in his scornful way, but the papers were full of realistic details; and did he mean to say the press deliberately lent itself to falsehood?

"I write for the papers myself," Ralph an-

swered, with a smile of which the lady could make nothing. She clung with a firmness worthy of a better cause to her pessimism—the country was going to ruin. It was a bold, a delightfully dangerous experiment to continue to live in it.

She patched up a formal peace with Deonys, and got the girl to come each evening to the gilded salon and translate the sensational paragraphs of the *Imparcial*. Santa Cruz was the villain of the hour. Horrible atrocities were attributed to this young *cura*, who was a hero to the red-capped Carlists in the north. Mrs. Henshaw thrilled with a kind of delicious horror at every new whisper of disaster.

"I think Mr. Malleson will scarcely decline to believe that there is danger now," she said significantly one evening. "Two hundred and thirty soldiers deserted from the barracks yesterday, and ran out to join the Carlists—*two hundred and thirty*, do you hear, Philippa? and Santa Cruz is said to be in the neighbourhood. I forget the name of the place, but quite near. We may be murdered in our beds any night. And this note from Mrs. B[illegible]d-Brown, you see, is more than three weeks old—delivered by a policeman, too! When things come to this pass, I think it shows a sad levity of mind to deny the peril we are in."

"You had better keep the envelope, mamma;

it is what you call documentary evidence. We can produce it, if people at home are rude enough to doubt our sufferings."

"You may laugh, Philippa; but I trust you may live to see your country again."

"I won't break my heart if I don't!"

"Major Gibbs was here when you were out, and he tells me it would be madness to risk a journey to the north. 'If you are anxious to be shot, you can go,' he says in his forcible way. And, with the lines cut, really I don't see how we can travel by rail."

Philippa laughed.

"We don't want to lose our heads just yet," she said, "that would be too much of a sensation. I shouldn't mind a little gentle imprisonment, but the red-caps don't sanction half measures, it seems. We must content ourselves with slipping out in safety by the south, as we always intended. 'Discretion is the better part of valour,' as the copy-books tell us."

"For myself," said Mrs. Henshaw, "I have no fear. I have never been accused of cowardice, though I may have many other failings; but I have to think of you, my child. Your safety must come first, at any personal inconvenience or expense. It will cost a great deal more; but we shall have the protection of our friends. It is perhaps wise to yield."

"We always proposed to go home that way, at least since Mr. Chester decided to take that route," Philippa answered, turning away. This kind of talk never deceived her, and she hated herself that she could not be deceived. There were times when she felt the saddest envy of Di's unquestioning, child-like faith in her father, of her pride in this cold, bland gentleman's every word and look. She could not remember an hour when she had not been able easily to pierce the flimsy drapery of high motive in which her mother clothed deeds and acts that were not noble. She had wished ardently for blindness, but she had never herself striven to reach the clear light in which things that are false cannot dwell. Her protests had only taken the form of undutifulness; and it was her punishment that she stood aside helpless, feeling herself slowly doomed to inescapable smallness of aim, and with hardly an impulse to set herself free.

While civil war was agitating the land, spring advanced with steady foot, and brought a brief interval of rare beauty to the brownness of the plain that flows round the city like a sea.

There is something of the breeziness and the loneliness of the ocean, of its large and peaceful quietude, in this wide stretch of undulating

land where you may walk for miles in silence unbroken except by the singing of the larks that rise at your very feet. The sun, so pitiless in summer, is in the short, swift spring tempered and genial, but strong enough to bring out in full relief the vivid green of the young grain, and the sad silver of the olives.

In so liberal a space of sky and earth there is room for much subtle change of light and shade, for vast expanse of sunset colour, tawny yellow, and orange. Di climbed up the steep Calle Ancha, and looked at it often from Mrs. Gordon's window.

She made her peace with Miss Barbara in those days.

"I meant no harm," she said, looking up into the older woman's face from her low seat near her friend's sofa.

"Well, I'm not one to keep up anger, we'll let bygones be bygones," said Miss Barbara, softened, perhaps, by a certain appealing look on the girl's face. "I only spoke to you for your good, but maybe I was too quick with my tongue."

Mrs. Gordon asked no questions; she was one of those restful women who seem to understand without being told.

"I am going away, you know," said Di, looking at her with her grave smile, "and I

couldn't let Miss Barbara be angry with me till I come back."

"Perhaps you will take us into your confidence then, Deonys," said Miss Barbara, unable to resist the last prompting of offence. "You'll remember that we were your mother's friends; Mrs. Gordon and me, and not Miss Piper. It doesn't become a young girl to forget old friends, and Miss Piper was never within your mother's door."

"She won't forget." Mrs. Gordon smiled at her. "Di's heart is big enough to hold us all."

"It isn't pretty in young people to be secretive," Miss Barbara went on, waxing a little angry at this too light way of meeting her remonstrance; "and if Deonys has anything to tell, we are the people that ought to hear it. No, Mary, I know what I am talking about; and I think girls ought to take advice, and not to fancy they are fit to judge for themselves. It would be only respectful to consult us."

"I have nothing to tell," said Di, sitting up and looking bravely into Miss Barbara's eyes. The hot colour swept like a fire across her cheek and brow, but her glance was steady. "I am going to England. I didn't want to go, but I think it will be a good thing to get away, far away, if you can think such things, that

I could forget you, mamma's old friends. And —and——" she broke down and faltered— "there is nothing to tell, except that I am going away."

"Well, well, you will maybe have some news for us when you come back." Miss Barbara hinted with dignity that she knew more than she cared to reveal. "And as for Miss Piper, poor silly body, I don't grudge your being kind to her; but, since you are such friends, I think you might make her wear gowns that are liker her years."

"Come, Barbara, who was preaching respect a moment ago?"

"There's a way of saying things that gives no offence," said Miss Barbara loftily; "and if Amelia Piper behaves like a girl she must expect to be treated like one."

But Di thought she knew of no road to reach the old place in Miss Barbara's esteem. It was, after all, but a disappointing truce. She felt vaguely sore and hurt at all her little world at this time. The visit to England, dreaded before, began to take the shape of a hope. She was longing for the refuge of indifferent eyes and unfamiliar faces. She did her best to be alone, and escaped visitors with some skill. She had to content herself in these troubled times with shorter rambles than in other years; but

the city itself was as safe under the red and purple of the republican colours as in the days of a constitutional monarchy, and there are hidden within it one or two corners where he who so wills can be alone with the wide earth and sky.

There is the old Florida, shabby, given over to slow decay, but sweet with a carpet of early violets, its formal, forlorn alleys green and solitary. The convent is deserted, too, and when you have passed the farm there is hardly a sign of life. You may wander over sandy roads that creep and twist and cease suddenly, as if they had lost heart and were too tired to go further. At the end of one long lane there is an old half-ruinous archway—a bit of rare colour, with its delicate mosaic of moss and lichen, that Di always made the limit of her walk. It is stranded in a neglected corner, and serves no present use, but the flowers grow gratefully under its shadow. When she had gathered all of these that she cared to carry, she turned homewards. Of late, she had given up her study of the gallery (Felix, and even Mrs. Henshaw, had taken to revisiting it), and contented herself with homelier pictures. Spring warmth brings out all the gladness of the southern nature, and it is impossible not to sympathize with the gaiety of the people. You see all

sorts of "interiors" as you peep into the *patios*, round which the tall houses are built. There is a great frankness in the life of the poor; the braseros are kindled, the meals prepared, the babies swaddled before your eyes; a girl combs her long black hair while she chatters to a neighbour leaning over a balcony; the rustic, ardent love-making, too, the quick consent, the vows that fall so hot from the lips—you may share this also if you choose. There was one courtyard at the entrance to which Di sometimes lingered to buy fruit of a wrinkled, quick-eyed old woman. It was a brighter court than others, with a great red fountain in the middle, and a narrow, formal garden, where, at times, the landlady herself was to be seen walking gorgeous as a sunflower in trailing silk. On the whole, there were many things to make these solitary walks pleasant, in spite of troubled thoughts.

Philippa was busy with a round of last gaieties; her time was, indeed, much in demand, since there were idle *attachés* to be entertained in all languages. Mrs. Henshaw's afternoon tea-table was graced no longer by Major Gibbs alone; and that bluff soldier found the ladies less charming than before. There were balls and concerts and theatres in the evening, and with so many attractions it was hardly a matter

of surprise that Philippa found little room for the claims of friendship.

"I shall be glad when we have left it all behind, and have fled to the south together," she said one evening, when she had snatched a moment to run upstairs.

"But you like it, don't you?" said Di. "How many have you had to-day, Philippa?"

"Oh, I don't know. The count, of course, and little Mr. Meyers, and Herr von Rosen."

"His Majesty the People is now king," said Ralph, who had sauntered in. "Rival courts are forbidden, Queen Philippa."

"Our salon isn't a court"—she turned to him with a smile—"it's a cave of Adullam, rather; a refuge for the bored and the *blasé*. If you knew how difficult it is to keep peace among them. It's all Mr. Meyer's length of upper lip, I believe."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Oh, somebody once told him it was a sign of sagacity, and he has been trying to be wiser than the rest of us ever since. We don't like people who are cleverer than ourselves; and besides, it's a sham sort of cleverness; you hear him dragging it out of himself as he talks. You never come to see us now, Mr. M[illegible]e-son."

"I am afraid of your ears. You would be

listening for the creaking of my internal machinery, too."

"No, I shouldn't. To prove it, I want to ask you something. Will you go to the south with us?"

"You may take Felix," he answered; "he's an idle youth. You may snub him if he is too clever. I give you leave."

"I believe he means to go," she answered, with a shade of petulance. "Granada doesn't belong to me. I can't prevent him paying it a visit if he likes."

"That is very generous of you. I hope you won't forbid his going to Cadiz, too, and taking a passage for England. I've had about enough of the young man."

"I don't think he is going home with us," she said, looking at him quite steadily. "There is a great deal for him to see here yet, and he isn't travelling for mere frivolity, like us," she said, with her frank smile. "He's travelling with a note-book."

"I've taken care of that," said Ralph, gravely. "I've an immense respect for that note-book. I've sent him off to Toledo just now with Dr. Carter. You don't know Carter? he's an epitome of all the ologies, and the Moorish invasion is his battle-horse. I expect by the time you are ready to go to Granada young

Felix will have had about enough of Toledo in particular, and antiquities in general, so you see you can accept his escort with an easy conscience."

"I have nothing to do with his movements," she said, almost coldly. "And all this is beside the question. I asked you to go with us. Mr. Ouvry is going, too."

"If I go it will be to look after Di; to see that she behaves herself," he said, looking across at her and meeting her answering glance. She had not spoken all this time.

"Yes, of course," she said. It seemed to her quite natural that he should look after her. Had he not taken care of her all her life?

"I want to be looked after, too," Philippa said, rising to go. She spoke lightly, but there was an unexpected look of wistfulness in her eyes, grave as they rarely were. It was almost as if she were making an appeal to be delivered from herself.

"That would be too much responsibility for one poor pair of shoulders. I find Miss Di more than I can manage."

"Very well," she said, with an odd sparkle in her eyes. "I warn you, you may regret not accepting my meek offer of submission. After this I shall feel free to do just as I like."

"Is it a declaration of war?" he said half mockingly, as he held the door open for her. "Thank you for warning me." He made her a grave bow.

"That is a strange girl," he said musingly, after she had left him. "I wonder if, after all——"

"What, Ralph?"

"Oh, nothing," he said carelessly; "and, besides, I can't always be playing Mentor to his Telemachus. That's about as coherent as one of Mrs. Henshaw's speeches, isn't it, Di? So you are really going to England under her wing?"

"Yes, I couldn't travel alone, I suppose? and the father can't go with me. Poor old padre! I don't like going to a country where he was so unhappy. I can't forgive England that."

"But you will like it," he said, skimming easily away from the dangerous ground of Mr. Ouvry's unhappiness. "London is the ninth wonder of the world."

"My cousin Bell doesn't know Mrs. Henshaw, I think," she said slowly.

"You don't know everybody in London," he smiled. "It's a collection of villages. You only know your own particular acquaintances."

"Is Kensington near Brompton?"

"Near enough for you to miss each other as often as you like."

"I don't want to miss Philippa." She looked at him reproachfully.

"Well, I shouldn't mind so very much."

"But you don't like her; I wish you did."

"Do you?" he said indifferently. "Then I'll try; it ought not to be so very difficult. You go on the principle of the French proverb, 'Qui aime Bertrand aime son chien.'"

"I don't think you are nice to her."

"You think me very intolerant?" He tossed back his hair. "Tolerance is good enough in its way; but it may be bad enough, too. When it is a question between right and wrong, between honour and dishonour, truth and falsehood, it is time to fling tolerance——"

He paused, for it appeared that Di was impertinently smiling at him.

"I know," she said meekly. "But don't fling it all away; keep a little scrap for Philippa and me, unless you mean any of these ugly insinuations for us. I wish you would speak less grumpily to Philippa—it would be good for her; she would listen to you."

"Would she?" he said with mock alarm; "but that might be dangerous. What if Felix took to horsewhipping me next—eh, Di?"

Perhaps she did not hear his badinage. She

was looking out of the window. When next she spoke it was to say, entreatingly—

"You will go to Granada with us?"

"I will join you there, at least, if I can't start with you. You are sure your father means to go?"

"Oh yes," she said simply; "he has been speaking to Mrs. Henshaw about it, and about my going with her to London. I don't think she likes it much. I'm in disgrace with everybody just now—Miss Barbara, too, like poor Miss Piper. Only you and the padre are contented with me."

"You won't be long together, you know," he said, more disturbed than he cared to show. "It's a short voyage; and in London you will have other friends. I want you to be often with my sister-in-law. She's a good little woman, and you will understand each other and get on famously over the babies."

"Oh, I should like that," she said eagerly; "the babies will be the greatest comfort. Bell is very sensible; and I'll disappoint her, I know."

"Well, you won't find Lady Malleson too sensible, I promise you."

"I'm afraid everybody will be so clever."

"Like Mr. Meyers?"

"You don't like very sensible people, do you, Ralph?"

"I adore stupidity."

"That's why you like me, I suppose?" She looked at him with a laugh. "You are very good to me on the whole, but everybody won't be like you and the padre."

"If they worry you over there you can always come back to the old home, you know."

"Don't say it like that! Don't you know I'll be counting the days till I get back again? Oh, Ralph! surely *you* don't think that I can change and forget old friends?" she said reproachfully.

"I am not afraid of your forgetting."

He looked at her with his grave kind eyes—a look that puzzled her. She went up to him and laid her hand on his sleeve.

"You may be quite sure I'll never forget," she said earnestly.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Ich bin zu alt um nur zu spielen,
Zu jung um ohne Wunsch zu sein."

Mrs. Henshaw spoke much of her return to England, but as yet she had fixed no date for her departure. She felt it to be a hard necessity rather than a pleasure to turn her back on a country that had treated her well. The English colony in Madrid had treated her very well. It had received her without question, and made her welcome to share its pleasures. True, for all purposes of insight into the national life of the country, she might as well have lived in Paris, or Florence, or Geneva. No Spanish door had been open to her; and of local customs and manners she had learned as little as any passing tourist. But she easily persuaded herself that this was no loss.

"They are all Roman Catholics, you know—if, indeed, they are *anything*, my dear," she confided, in writing, to her friend, Mrs. Baird-

Brown. "And think of the risk to my Philippa!"

Philippa, indeed, was in no danger, in spite of her many conquests. She was gracious and pleasant to all; but there was a touch of hardness about her at this time that was, perhaps, her truest safeguard. When poor Mr. Meyers, forgetting to be wise, put his feelings into words that were as foolish as the ravings of most wooers, he found that the lady of his choice could be cold and almost cruel.

"Why did you tell him we let our house?" said Mrs. Henshaw complainingly; "it sounds so bad."

"It sounds true. Why should he think we are richer than we are?"

"Since you were refusing him, you might have let him believe what he liked. Explanations of that kind are in such bad taste. And to say that we had no position or fortune!"

"It is quite true, mamma. I would say it to them all to-morrow, if it would keep them away. I don't want them to talk to me. I hate when people make love to me," she said vehemently, for the time fully believing what she said. "Oh, mamma, let us go away—let us go by ourselves," she said, moved to rare entreaty. "Let us go somewhere where nobody knows us—where we can begin again."

"We are going soon, dear," said her mother soothingly, "whenever we can be ready. You know your new dresses have not come home yet; but Blake can begin our packing some day, if you wish it so much."

"Let me begin now," said Philippa eagerly. She lifted a little ornament as she spoke. They had gathered many knickknacks about them, and offerings from Philippa's knights had not been wanting.

"Must we take all these things home with us? Well, I shall pack them myself. You know, mamma, I'm a far better packer than Blake."

"Yes, dear child, but you forget that this is Mrs. Cross's day at home, and we promised to go. Indeed it is quite time to get ready. You shall dismantle the room when we come back, and I won't say a word, though I think there is nothing so uncomfortable as sitting in a room stripped of all its ornaments. It is really almost like being half-dressed."

She was not alarmed. She knew that the hot vehemence of this mood would pass the more quickly because it was an alien mood. Philippa knew it too. She turned away listlessly. Already the little spring of desire to live cleanly and act truly had died away. She was her brightest self, the centre and the life of Mrs.

Cross's reception, and she spoke no more of flight.

Mrs. Henshaw did not remind her of her haste to be gone. It was only necessary to keep the unhappy Mr. Meyers, who made Philippa irritable by his wretched looks, out of sight, and a little skill accomplished that. The unfortunate suitor's absence secured, all seemed to go well. The drawing-room ornaments were allowed to remain, and no further hint of packing was given. Mrs. Henshaw herself was well content to linger. Her social position was better here than she could ever hope to make it in London; and there was no charm in the thought of returning to a house that had been given over to the mercy of strangers. She knew very well what that meant. There was the wrangle with the agent over the inventory; the dispute with the late occupiers about the worn carpets, damaged furniture, and cracked tea-cups; then, when her dispersed household gods had been regathered, there followed that dreary campaign—that struggle for place and recognition that makes the London season a daily-fought battle to so many women. It was not to be wondered at that she was in no haste to renew the combat, while she could command e pleasures of conquest at a lesser price.

us, the homeward journey might have been

deferred to the Greek calends, but for the heat which came with a sudden stride in the late spring, and for the danger which, real or imaginary, was made the most of by the daily press. Now and again, as on the last day of Carnival, when the fooling was at a height, a panic seized the whole city; rumour swept like a wind through the streets, and cleared them as if by magic.

Mrs. Henshaw went home with trembling limbs, and began the long-delayed packing forthwith. A few more experiences of a "corrido" settled the matter. All her former dread returned unsupported by the old delightful thrills; her heroism vanished. It became a solemn duty to leave a capital threatened alike without and within. The dull respectability of the Brompton house took the shape of a refuge.

"For the sake of our friends we must be prudent," she would say. "And it is not as if we were going alone; that would be too sad." When this remark was made to Felix, he knew that he was expected to escort the ladies back to London, but for once a ready reply failed him. His going or remaining depended on many things that were not within Mrs. Henshaw's ken.

Early in the glowing days of April marching orders were given. Di's wardrobe did not take

long to pack; and she spent the hours that were left to her in making her farewells.

Miss Barbara's heart misgave her at the last moment. The stream of good advice flowed less copiously than usual. For once, the clan Gordon failed to point a moral. She contented herself with a great many questions put severely to hide the warmer throbbing of her love.

"Did you wrap up your new silk gown in silver paper, Deonys? Two new gowns in a month! It's a great piece of extravagance. I wonder what my mother would have said to it. I thought myself well off at your age when I got one of Martha's dresses turned and made up for my best. There was some stuff in a gown then to make it worth the turning. Nowadays nothing but new things will serve you young folks; but what can you look for when people that should know better trick themselves out in satin?"

"One does not go on a journey every day," said Mrs. Gordon, smiling at Di, who sat at her feet, her chin buried in two hands.

"I'm not grudging her the gowns, Mary," said Miss Barbara, with a little offended jerk of the head; "but she may as well learn to take care of them. And you'll remember to pin up the strings when you take off your bonnet, Deonys, and wrap it in a clean handkerchief."

"Yes," said Di, who felt herself bound to give penitent heed to these last admonitions. "I'll only wear it on Sundays, you know. I don't need to tie up my chin more than once a week, do I?"

"Well, I hope it won't take your mind off the sermon. You'll never forget to go to church, though I hear that they have fallen into sad heathenish ways in England, making out that the Sabbath is ended after morning service. You had better take notes and send them once a week to Mrs. Gordon and me; it will keep you from thinking too much of your new clothes."

"Sunday will be the only bit of the week that will seem like home," said Di, with a little sigh. "They can't alter the service, at any rate."

"I dare say you'll be asked out a good deal," Miss Barbara went on, bent on supplying a code of manners to fit every emergency; "and I'm not saying you need refuse, though I hope you won't feel uplifted. You'll only wear your silk for very best, and your old white dress will do for tea parties. They won't ask a child like you to dinner, unless fashions are greatly changed. I'm not going to say anything about your behaviour, for I am sure you will never forget that you are your mother's daughter;

and if you are half as bonnie and as good, you'll do."

This was highly magnanimous, and Di was not without gratitude.

"Indeed, you may trust me," she said, with a sudden flush.

"I'm going to say nothing more; it would show a poor faith in our training if I was to be afraid. I think this is the time, Mary, to tell Deonys of our intentions. We may both be dead before she comes back. Your health is not much to boast of at any time; and, though I've the Gordon constitution——"

"Oh, don't speak like that!"

"We must all die," said Miss Barbara severely; "and I hope you are not silly enough, Deonys, to think that speaking of your will is going to bring your last day any nearer?"

"My will!" said Di, bewildered; "I've nothing to leave."

"But we have. You needn't always be thinking of yourself, child; no one was speaking of your will. It's as well to be prepared for everything; and I may tell you we have not forgotten you. It may be a comfort to you to remember it when you are among strangers."

"There isn't much to leave," said Mrs. Gor-

don, amused at the girl's perplexed face; "we are not going to make an heiress of you, Di."

"The Gordon plate is not to be despised, Mary," Miss Barbara spoke with lofty dignity; "though, as you are only one of us by marriage, you can't be expected to value it as I do. Deonys won't be the worse for some good, solid silver to set up housekeeping with—it's better than the trash people think so much of as marriage presents. But you must marry a good young man, you know, Di," she added, with grim good humour; "and somebody that Mrs. Gordon and I approve of. I can't have the family heirlooms pass into unworthy hands."

"I am not going to marry anybody," said Di, the hot colour mounting to her brow. "Oh, Miss Barbara, you are very kind; but, indeed, I'd rather you didn't think of me."

"Well, I suppose you'll want a teapot whether you marry or not?" she rejoined drily. "And I'm not going to put notions in your head—they'll come there soon enough. If you prefer earthenware, like that silly body, Miss Piper, who, for all her miniatures and her satin gowns, hasn't so much as a silver teaspoon to boast of, it's a very poor taste, that's all I can say." sh

"I shall like anything you care to give m iook-anything at all. You know that, don't ery good

said Di, springing up and putting her arms round Miss Barbara's stiff neck, to the derangement of her starched muslin handkerchief.

"Well, well, be a good bairn," she said, relenting under this caress. "And the tray is without a scratch—I will say that; there's never a teacup been put on it without a bit of waxcloth below."

A little depressed by so much good advice, and not elated by this hint of possible heirship, Di hailed Ralph Malleson's unexpected appearance with unfeigned delight. She had just left Miss Piper, who had also her word of timid maidenly warning to give to the girl who was going out into the wide, wicked world, peopled, in this lady's imagination, with processions of young men bent on enticing maidens to make the great experiment.

"Oh, Ralph!" she cried, "where did you spring from? I've been saying good-bye to everybody, and it's horrid."

"In that fatal word there breathes despair," said Ralph philosophically. "You don't propose that we should take farewell of each other, too, do you?"

"Not yet, if you are a good boy. You might take me for a little walk, it isn't very late; and ·v soon we shall have no chance of walks

"Then we had better go to the Florida; its melancholy wastes will be in keeping with our feelings."

"Come and see the mountains," she said comfortably slipping her arm into his. "I've been looking at them from Miss Piper's window; and, do you know, there is hardly a scrap of snow left anywhere—not more than 'a poor man's washing,' as Concha says. Have you been reading?" she asked, noticing that he carried a large volume. "Oh, I know," she added severely; "you've been reviewing it, you've been cutting it up!"

"Into mincemeat. Could you expect me to have mercy on a man who never 'begins' but always 'commences,' and who speaks of the immortal Velasquez as a 'talented painter?'"

"You ought to think of his feelings."

"He ought to consider mine. He hasn't spared me a line of his tediousness; this is only the half of his puerility. Let us be thankful publishers don't insist on three-volumed books of travels yet; this fellow would have been quite equal to the occasion, you can see with what reluctance he writes his finis."

"I won't let you see a word of my English diary," said Di, holding up her head and looking at him severely; "and it will be very good

indeed, because I'll have the advantage of all my cousin Bell's opinions."

"Come," said Ralph, with much apparent depression, "who is severe now? But you'll write to me sometimes? If you will promise to write, I'll let you off showing the diary, and that's a most magnanimous offer, since I'll lose all the benefit of Miss Bell's mature experience. You wouldn't be so frivolous as to put it in a letter, of course."

"Oh, yes, I'll write," said Di, growing melancholy at the thought of the separation involved in this promise. "And I want you to do some things for me, Ralph. I want you to go very often to see Miss Piper."

"You don't think there would be any danger—eh?"

"She trusts you," said Di, half remorseful at the smile she could not resist. "You couldn't ask her to tea, I suppose?" she continued doubtfully; "but you might go there—that would please her. And you could take some cakes with you; Concha will get them for you. You might say that you were very hungry, and it would be quite true, because you do like tea, you know."

"I might go without dinner, and then there would be absolute truth in the statement. Must I appear in a swallow-tail, and do you think she will put on the blue satin?"

"The blue satin for you? No, indeed! Oh, Ralph, do you know I think she starves herself." She looked up at him with all the laughter extinguished in her soft eyes. "And that greedy Mariquita eats so much." I found Miss Piper at dinner, and she told me that she had no appetite. She said the Pipers all ate sparingly; but she looked hungry, and I know she was saving for Mariquita's supper." Di always spoke earnestly when her thoughts were busy with this poor lady, the sole survivor of a long line.

"Don't you think the cousin—he of the silk trade—could be induced to come forward again?" Ralph offered the suggestion with a smile. "Why should he stop at a paltry gown? Now, if he were to propose a little sum annually —it's nothing to him, you know—and I dare say he was gratified to get that note from his kinswoman."

Di laughed.

"He managed very nicely that time," she said, "and Philippa kept the secret beautifully. Do you know Mrs. Henshaw went to call on Miss Piper the day after the ball?"

"The philosophy of clothes," said Ralph, calmly.

"It is very good of you, Ralph; but we mustn't think of it. She would find out, and

that would vex her. I don't think it matters so much about her being poor, if Miss Barbara would only forgive her—if you could bring that about?" She looked at him wistfully.

He shook his head.

"I will confess to you, Di, that I stand in awe of Miss Barbara. She snubs me. Ever since that affair of the silver plate she has looked on me as an indiscreet and frivolous youth, unworthy of trust."

"And the teapot is to be mine," said Di, laughing; "so if you let any one steal it while I am in England you will have to reckon with me."

Thus they chatted lightly while the golden afternoon spent itself. Spring, in this ripe land, does her work almost audibly. As you listen you seem to hear the grass-blades growing; the wind that rustles melodiously through the tree branches sets free an imprisoned bud at every breath; pulsing, palpitating life is everywhere about you.

Presently they both yielded to the spell, and ceased to talk. They were used to such pauses; their friendship did not need the support of perpetual speech, it could stand the test of silence. They had seated themselves on a stone bench in the gardens by the river. Above them the little palace stood on a ridge overlooking the

green avenues and the wider country beyond. There was a bit of mellow, crumbling wall near them; in and out of the loose masonry bright-eyed green lizards were darting. Deonys was watching them idly, with thoughts that wandered speculatively into the future, not without vague thrills of anticipated pleasure in spite of her reluctance to face it.

Ralph was not smoking, as was usual with him—he was conscious of a new and overmastering restlessness that made it difficult even to sit still. He got up once, and brought her a handful of flowers. She took them and began to weave them mechanically while he paced the path in front of her. That brief half-hour held one of the great struggles of life—the battles that are fought in silence, leaving to careless eyes no visible scar. It was so difficult to let her go and not to speak the words that had hovered on his lips so long. It was not the quick growth of a month or two; it was a love that was bound up with many years of his life—with all of it that belonged to his manhood. He remembered his hot youth, his voluntary renouncing of ambition, only as one remembers a fever dream. The awakening, the peace and strength of recovery, the reviving of hope, were all one with the thought of her. He recalled how, as a little unconscious child, she had com-

forted his sore and angry heart; how with time she had but grown nearer and dearer. It was a love fed by many memories, acquiring every year "fresh strength and sanctity." It was hard to forbid it speech.

As he looked at her he felt the impulse fierce within him to go to her, to take the little brown hand so carelessly busy among the flowers, and to say to her—"Stay with me, do not go to England; let us begin a new life here, together."

He knew that she would let her fingers lie without trembling in his clasp; he knew her sweet, candid eyes would rest with perfect trust on his; that her lips would utter the consenting "yes" with hardly a moment's faltering pause. He could count on her old habit of affection, on her unwillingness to give pain, even on her deep desire to give him pleasure; but the treasure of her love—was that for him?

"When she comes back," he said to himself, reining in the impetuous words that were eager to leap forth. The time to speak had not yet come. He counted much on her coming back. She might not like the great, busy world; she might feel lonely and miss him there. His thoughts were interrupted by her light laugh.

"Look here, Ralph," she said; "come and look at this?"

He came up, and stood for a moment in silence.

She was leaning with her arms on the back of the seat.

Behind, half hidden out of sight by the overgrown bushes, was an ancient statue, broken and defaced almost beyond recognition—a Hebe, perhaps, long ago robbed of her urn. This meek, weather-stained head Di had crowned with her flowers.

A sudden, whimsical fancy crossed his deeper thought, and he, too, laughed aloud. The worn face, with its fantastic adornment, reminded him of nothing so much as of Miss Piper.

"You are a very irreverent young woman," he said.

"Why irreverent? Isn't she a goddess? I am crowning her."

> "Gods bereaved, gods belated,
> Gods discrowned and desecrated,
> Now, Pan is dead."

He spoke absently. "So they say, but I question it. He is hiding down there among the reeds, and when our backs are turned he will lift his head and look about him—then he will creep up here. Listen! don't you hear him piping?"

"I hear the wind and the water."

"And, I declare, Di, your ancient Hebe is smiling," he said. He had flung himself on the turf at her feet, and looked up at her lazily. "She hears him, at any rate."

"Nonsense," said Di, hitting him softly with a flower which she threw at him; "how could you smile if you had a broken nose and no lips to speak of?"

"I've heard of people smiling with a broken heart—that must be a more difficult feat."

"You don't believe in broken hearts?"

"Men have died and worms have eaten them—but not for love," he answered calmly. "Your sickly, sentimental people who think all is lost because their desire is denied them always seemed to me to be made of very flimsy, useless stuff. Duty is greater than happiness. It is the law of life for more of us than Goethe dreamed of perhaps, 'dass wir entsagen müssen.'"

His voice was hard. He was preaching this stern sermon to himself. She said nothing, but she shivered a little, and the flowers dropped from her fingers.

"Poor Hebe!" said Ralph, with a laugh, "your crown has come too late."

"Don't you believe in another life, Ralph; a life for people who fail here?"

"I know nothing. But, on the whole, if

there is not something a little less narrow and ignoble in front of us, I'd rather have been born a good while back. Say, in the age when the big lizards were masters of the world—the huge forefathers of that little fellow on the wall—before we had developed this opposable thumb which, according to Mr. Herbert Spencer, gave us the kingship over the beasts. How should you like to have been a big lizard, Di?"

"I shouldn't have had to go to London."

"And I shouldn't have had to write an article on the political crisis. Newspapers were not in that happy age, nor 'copy' nor printers' devils waiting at the door. But, as I am not a joyful care-free iguanodon, Di, understand that I must go home. Look, the sunlight has died off that wall already."

"And it is our last walk," she said, rising reluctantly, "until you come to England. You will take me walks in London, won't you?"

"If the powers that be don't forbid. Isn't Miss Bell a great stickler for propriety? She may object to my appropriating you."

"I don't care what Bell thinks," she said recklessly; "and I'll watch for you every day. You must come in this old velvet coat, Ralph, because then you will seem like a bit of home."

"Miss Bell's footman might hesitate to admit me."

"I'll let you in," she answered confidently. "I'll be looking out for you; and I don't think, besides, Bell is so grand as to have a footman."

He had quite mastered himself again. A little cynicism, not quite worthy perhaps, came to his aid, and he had all an Englishman's horror of any self-betrayal.

Man is a many-sided animal, and even his keenest emotion has dangerous rivals. He loved this girl well and truly. It was no mere fancy. He was, indeed, "too old to play"—too young to have outlived hope and desire. But love with the man is never, as sometimes with the woman, the one absorbing interest of life. His existence was not made up of tea-drinkings with elderly ladies, or of walks and talks with younger maidens. He had his work and his friendships—a whole world of occupations they could not share, of plans and desires they never dreamed of. For the rest he could wait. The only thing he had learned well was this lesson of waiting. It seemed, when he came to think of it calmly, something less than honourable to claim a promise from her—and he knew she would promise—to bind her to himself and to his poor fortunes, before she had so much as tried her wings in the larger world, or turned her eyes beyond the narrow limits of her home. She should have

every chance. He would not ask her to share his crust while there might be others eager to offer her the cakes and ale of life. For she ought to have the best. Putting aside every wish of his own, he always came back to that —this little girl was worthy of the very best.

"There is one thing, Di," he said after a little, speaking carelessly; "you promised to let me know if anything bothered you. I fancy that you and Mrs. Henshaw don't pull very well together."

"I don't like her," she answered with perfect candour, "and she doesn't like me; but that isn't why—— "

"If you don't care about travelling with her," he interrupted lightly, "you have only got to say so, and we can find some other escort. I may be going myself. And there are the Grants; some one told me they were going home soon."

"Oh, but you mustn't think I mind travelling with her," she answered reassuringly; "it isn't so bad as that. And it isn't the things she says so much as herself I dislike. But I am not at all afraid of her now; and there is Philippa—— "

"Were you ever afraid of her?" he asked. The lady in question hardly seemed to him

likely to inspire fear—rather, perhaps, a gentle contempt.

"I will tell you: I was dreadfully afraid she would marry the padre."

"Marry your father!" he said with some surprise, forgetting that this had at one time been his own solution of the mysterious relations that seemed to exist between them. "Why, you foolish child, have you been making yourself miserable about that?" He could hardly restrain a smile. Mr. Ouvry subject to the grand passion! The notion had its ludicrous side.

"Not now. But once I thought of it, and it made me dreadfully angry. I could not have forgiven her if she had taken the padre from me."

"Not even to have had Philippa for a sister?"

She shook her head.

He could not know how difficult loyalty to Philippa had proved, what pangs steadfast love had cost her; but the remembrance brought a little shadow over her bright face.

"She would not have been my sister always. She will go away and have a home of her own, and be very happy."

"And you—— Don't you propose to have a home of your own some day, too? If you

insist on making a Miss Piper of yourself, I'll have a word to say to you in my capacity of guardian."

His tone was careless, but if she had looked at him then she might have read his secret in his face. We can deceive with the words of the lips, but truth springs uncontrolled from the eyes.

But she was not thinking of him at that moment. They had left the river and the whispering reeds; they had climbed the ridge which is crowned by the little palace. She had turned her head and was looking back—a last long glance at the tangled wilderness of the garden, the wide plain, and, far to the west, the faint blue ranges of Avila and Bejar. It was but a moment to take farewell of these and of other visions; then she looked at him with gentle seriousness.

"I have the padre and you," she said.

END OF VOL. II.

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ALASNAM'S LADY.

A MODERN ROMANCE.

BY

LESLIE KEITH,

AUTHOR OF "SURRENDER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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ALASNAM'S LADY.

CHAPTER I.

> "Soit lointaine, soit voisine,
> Espagnole ou Sarrasine,
> Il n'est pas une cité
> Qui dispute, sans folie,
> A Grenade la jolie,
> La pomme de la beauté,
> Et qui, gracieuse, étale
> Plus de pompe orientale
> Sous un ciel plus enchanté."

MADAME LAVOISIER was a prudent woman. She might consider in her secret heart that the preparations Bell thought necessary for the reception of her young cousin were a little too urgently pressed on the household, but she held her peace. She did more. She set her clever fingers—skilled in all dainty arts—to trim and decorate the room destined for Di till it blossomed into a dainty bower under her touch.

"If you would but let me arrange for you a

little," she said, contemplating with pride the draperies of pink and white muslin, in which she had swathed the bed and toilet-table, "your room is like a desert."

"No, indeed," said Bell emphatically; "you know I hate curtains. And, besides, my windows face the back, where all the smuts come in."

"And yet you insist on this beautiful apartment for a little savage?"

"Di isn't a savage!" Bell corrected her with dignity. "And if she is silly, she can't help that, I suppose?"

"You will soon make her wise, my dear," said madame with her fine smile.

"I will try." Bell spoke sedately, quite unaware of any reason why she should smile in reply. "And you will help me, of course? You must give her French lessons; I dare say she has had no advantages at all. What is the use of knowing Spanish? One gets more than enough of Don Quixote in a translation."

"To learn a language one must live in the country where it is spoken," said madame, uttering this truism with an ulterior object not difficult to detect.

"Oh, I know quite well what you mean," said Bell calmly; "I have heard all that before."

"My child, your accent is really deplorable. It distresses me, it pains me beyond measure, it makes me feel as if I had failed in my duty towards you."

"Then I'll read French with Di and you." said Bell, beginning to laugh. "Between us we shall agonize you. How I pity your ears! I'll get another copy of 'Télémaque' and a new dictionary, and we can begin whenever Di has rested from her journey."

"A month in Paris—a little month," madame murmured, "would do more than the toil of years in this barbarous country."

"Di must see England first," Bell explained gravely. "You will notice that I am not at all prejudiced. I make no complaint about Scotland coming second; I am willing she should see everything before I take her to Kylmure."

"Then we go to Kylmure!" Madame folded her hands in resigned despair.

"Of course," said Bell, staring at her; "have you forgotten that my uncle is Scotch, though he has chosen to repudiate his country and live in a foreign land?"

"Ah," said madame lightly, "there may be good reasons for that."

Bell paused and looked at her doubtfully, trying, perhaps, to discover if there was a double meaning in this careless speech.

"I didn't know you knew," she said oracularly.

Madame did not know, but she said nothing.

"There is at least no reason why Di should not see her native land," Bell went on gravely after a moment. "And if she is not a great deal more silly that I think she is, she will be displeased with me that I do not take her there at once."

"One must not mind the displeasure of a foolish child," said madame, putting light finishing touches to the drapery of a mirror. Her neat bodice was stuck over with pins. She held her head on one side, and was seemingly absorbed in her task, but she glanced a little curiously at Bell, who stood twisting the cord of the blind absently in her fingers, and looking out in front of her with eyes that saw nothing. London was at least a degree more endurable than the Highland moors Bell held in such passionate love; it was also nearer the longed-for paradise on the other side of the channel.

Bell had apparently not heard the last words. She moved from the window presently, and came and stood near the table. She watched madame adjust an airy little bow of pink ribbon with great nicety.

"I want to be good to her," she broke out suddenly. "She is my only cousin, and my

uncle"—she hesitated—"if he is not all that he ought to have been, and I suppose that is what you meant when you spoke of reasons, there is the more need to take her away and to be kind to her."

"Eh, why shouldn't we be kind to the poor child?" said madame, who was very discreet. "A child like that is easily amused. We must take her to see the sights. The English love to look at the block on which they severed the heads of their kings and queens, and at the graves in Westminster Abbey. And for a little liveliness you could have a dance and a musical evening and a little acting, perhaps. I myself would not mind helping you to arrange the costumes. Believe me, young people must be gay."

"Oh, of course she must see the Tower—that is very instructive. And we'll have the dance, too, if she likes," said Bell, who wished to be magnanimous; "but I do, ope she isn't like the Redmaynes and the Harrisons, with not a thought beyond balls and theatres."

"She is eighteen," said madame significantly.

"She will be nineteen in June. I asked her in my last letter," said this literal young lady. "But of course I wish her to be happy in her own way, if not in mine. I think the room will do splendidly; it only wants some books."

"Ah, Télémaque and the dictionary!—Eugénie Grandet is very improving reading."

"Balzac," said Bell severely, "you will be proposing Zola next."

"I will leave the literature to you," said madame gracefully; "but some flowers, you will not forbid the little one flowers, will you, Bell?"

"I have thought of them," she answered hastily, with an odd suspicion of a blush. "I'll provide them in good time; it's too soon yet, they would wither before she came. Lunch will be ready in ten minutes," she said warningly, disappearing as she spoke.

Madame Lavoisier laughed softly to herself in the solitude of the pretty room. Bell's independence, her formality, her candour amused the lady who acted the part of mother and guide. When she tried to hold a little secret she was only clumsy. Madame had a great respect for people who could keep a secret, but she loved Bell, and she forgave her that she could not better learn to command her face. That hint as to Mr. Ouvry's possible motives for living in Madrid was a mere random arrow, but that it had sped home proved how poor a woman of the world Bell was. Madame had but to ask and everything would be told her, but she had the grace not to ask. "In five minutes she will let the cousin know that she has penetrated the

father's little mystery." She shrugged her shoulders; how could she help it? She was sorry for the poor little victim about to be overwhelmed with Bell's compassionate kindness; but what could she do? You could no more teach Bell not to show what she felt than you could substitute a pure Parisian accent for her faulty French.

Meantime the house was being turned upside down for Di's benefit. Bell took infinite pains to secure for her the prettinesses she scorned for herself. The house which she had occupied for several winters had satisfied her, though it distressed her companion, because it was furnished with some regard to solidity, and because the frivolous trifles that it pleased the woman of her acquaintance to gather about them were absent.

Now all this was to be changed. Di was to be made comfortable and happy, and, if it was necessary to her felicity to be surrounded by monstrosities in the garish crewel work then coming into fashion, by specimens of curious and unlovely china, by King Charles' spaniels, Manx cats, love-birds, even, then these should not be awanting. She braved the laughter of her friend, Miss Townsend, and went to her for instruction. She was eager to learn, and busied herself with a patient study of the latest vagaries of the feminine fancy. Her own room,

as madame had protested, remained like a desert. There was no carpet, curtains were forbidden because these impeded the entrance of fresh air through the windows, open day and night to admit it. There was an atmosphere of chill robustness, a great look of virtue in the few plain, strong chairs, and the table loaded with books and materials for useful needlework. The contrast between it and the little bower made ready for Deonys was perfect. It would be difficult to explain all her motives in making these preparations, in "violating her principles," as Miss Townsend put it; but undoubtedly the strongest of them was a wish to be kind. She had neglected her cousin too long, and now she wished to atone for her neglect. When this young woman conceived any particular line of action to be her duty, she was apt to embrace it with a breathless promptitude, and her nearest obligation at this moment seemed to her to be the consolation of Deonys.

Madame might lift her eyebrows and shrug her shoulders delicately, but she could not make Bell see that she was arguing from a false premiss, when she supposed Di to be a suffering and badly-used young person. Bell, in truth, knew very little about her uncle, and could not have revealed any thrilling secrets to her friend, but she understood that he had "done something,"

in business that made it pleasant and comfortable for him to pitch his tent in a country that had then no extradition treaty with England. The very vagueness of the charge against him made her doubly severe in her judgment of him, but it also lent a two-edged keenness to her desire to console Di. With her, as with so many others, "to be loved one must be suffering;" she had little sympathy with the prosperous and the happy, but any hint of real pain or trouble was quick to stir her native kindliness. She invested her unknown cousin with all her own sensitive shrinking from any taint of dishonour. She pictured her as living in a perpetual warfare between duty and affection, made the harder because she was undoubtedly, to judge by her letters, a weak and wavering little woman. In short, Di was the excellent and much-tried heroine of fiction; and Bell, the good genius who always comes forward to reward virtue in story books.

"You want to let her down gently, I know," said Miss Townsend, who came to survey the preparations in the capacity of critic. "But, Bell, my dear, I'm afraid you have overshot the mark. If you demoralize her with all this luxury, how will you reconcile her to Scotland, where I understand one has to rough it a little?"

"I suppose you think the kilt is universal,

and that we all live on porridge," said Bell, quick to defend her nation. "Not that I see any reason why we shouldn't. In the Crimean war it is a known fact that the kilted regiments suffered much less than the others, and as for porridge, if you would consent to take it for breakfast, Amelia ——"

"Thank you," said Miss Townsend faintly. "I think I'll see how it agrees with your cousin first."

"It would give you a beautiful complexion."

"That would be dear bought," said Miss Townsend, with a shudder. "Now, that's what I call very clever of you," she suddenly exclaimed. "I shouldn't have given you credit for so much diplomacy, Bell."

She was standing before a daintily-carved bookcase, and she glanced at its contents with much amusement. The books, which were good editions, had been selected with a great deal of cunning, and they, everyone of them, had for their theme the glorifying of "the North Countree." There was the immortal Scott, of course; and there were also the works of a later master of fiction, who has proved to us that the earthly paradise is to be found in certain islands of the far north Atlantic.

"Where could you find better books, for novels?" Bell asked, with a touch of defiance in her voice.

"Oh, certainly," said Miss Townsend demurely. "I'm so glad you don't draw the line short of novels. Scotch novels by Scotch writers, of course. I'll borrow some of them next time I have one of my bad colds."

"Well, only when you have a really bad one, Amelia."

"And what about the little Spanish cousin," said Amelia in an injured voice. "Do you mean to say you have bought all these books—not even got them from Mudie's or Smith's—just to be ready in case she falls ill!"

"I don't mean her to be ill—if I can help it," said Bell evasively.

"Now, Bell, do you mean to tell me Miss Ouvry won't read every one of these novels after you suppose her to be in bed and safely tucked in for the night? I dare say you will take away the candles, but you will give her a fire, of course—she is sure to be chilly—and she will be a horrid little paragon if she doesn't steal out of bed after you are gone and read herself blind by the light of the flames."

"She may read in the daytime," said Bell bravely.

"Read novels in the daytime! Do I hear aright?"

"I got them for her to read. And, Amelia, you don't understand. I can't explain—for a

has suffered a great deal. She has been very unhappy."

"Oh," said Miss Townsend airily, "and I suppose I, being English, don't suffer when I have one of my—— "

"I'll bring you a whole armful next time," Bell interrupted, owning herself to be defeated. "English ones—there are some good English novels."

"What a generous admission! I'll keep you to your word. Do you know, my dear, I think you are not so very unlike the rest of us, after all."

That Miss Bell had indeed a redeeming spice of folly in her to link her to her kind was proved to the satisfaction of Madame Lavoisier a few days later, when a neat hamper was delivered by the Great Northern Railway Company's van at the Kensington house.

"It's—some flowers I ordered," said Bell, eyeing the hamper rather shamefacedly. "Take it to my room, Morris."

"Flowers? oh, do let me help you to arrange them. I adore flowers," cried madame. "Covent Garden in the morning early—four—five o'clock. That is one of the things you must take the little cousin to see. It is less te than the graves in the abbey."

didn't get these from Covent Garden."

Bell looked straight at her friend. "I sent to Kylmure for them; the school children gathered them."

"Ah, from Kylmure." Madame spoke softly, as if she did not know very well—cunning woman—that the order had been given days before.

"I dare say you think me very silly," said Bell loftily.

"It is charming. A beautiful attention. I begin to have hope of you, my child."

"Oh, it isn't anything to make a fuss about," she answered almost petulantly; "it was only a fancy of mine."

"Shall we put the poor flowers in water?"

Madame's dainty fingers were hovering about the rope that bound the hamper. Her face was admirably grave. That the practical, sensible, unimaginative Bell should indulge in a fancy was a thing one might be pardoned for smiling at. Madame's hopes began to rise. To be sure this pretty attention was only for the benefit of the little cousin and for the glorification of Scotland, but it might grow—this little seed of sentiment. The next time it might be someone else for whom the flowers were ordered. Already, while her quick fingers were unravelling the knots, her Spanish castle was a-building. If one might not go to Paris, what was to hinder a

little bit of Paris from visiting London? There was a certain M. Adolphe, for instance, who had never seen the great modern Babylon, which, after all, it was the duty of every one to see. If the young guest about to arrive were unhappy, as Bell insisted, what could be better for her than the society of a lively and charming young man, who was, moreover, madame's cousin, and quite, one might say, a child of the house?

Madame had got the length of considering it a serious duty to provide for the perfecting of her pupil's accent, when Bell somewhat rudely checked the growth of this air-fabric.

"Don't trouble yourself about arranging them," she said; "they are only wild flowers. You know you don't care about wild flowers."

"There are here the contents of an entire wood," said madame, contemplating the treasure before her. "They have been diligent for once, the children. But to sleep with so many flowers about one?"

"Morris can take the vases away at night," said Bell, preparing to march off with her spoils. "Of course, I know they are not good in a sleeping room, especially for people who won't open the window, and prefer to kill themselves with carbonic acid."

With this parting shot she lifted the hamper and went away, her head in the air, her step

firm. It was true, as madame said, that the whole spring verdure of the Kylmure woods seemed to have been transported to the dull London house. There were no cowslips like those that grew tall and strong on the banks of the Kylmure burn under the birches and firs; the little blue cups of the squill seemed to bring with them the deep azure of the sky and the scent and sound of the sea as it breaks on the red-brown rocks of that northern shore. Bell, with her passionate patriotism, felt as if the very flowers must plead with Di for love of the land they came from. Surely, she could not mistake their language.

The room looked very pretty when the last touches were put to it. It would, perhaps, be too much to say that all this elaborate preparation was part of a deep-laid scheme, but it was certain that Bell entertained subtle plans for winning Di over to loyalty. She would teach her to love Scotland so much that she would never care to leave it. She was very angry indeed when madame hinted that Di might fall in love and might even marry and settle far from the north.

"What has she to do with marriage?" she said hotly. "She will never think of it—never. You must not put such notions into her head."

"They generally come of themselves."

"Not unless they are talked about. You must not speak to her about lovers," she lec-

tured her old governess; and madame, afraid to imperil M. Adolphe's chances of an invitation to London, promised penitently.

"She will live with me. I don't mean to marry, as you know quite well; and I have plenty of money for us both."

"And the little one's father?"

"Of course he must consent. He will see that it is for her good. She will have advantages here that she could not have in Spain, and there are many reasons why it would be best. As for all that talk about marrying, I think it is great folly."

"There are so many foolish people in the world!"

"Well, Di and I need not add to the number. We can stay all the year round at Kylmure, when you carry out that ridiculous plan of yours, and go to live in Paris. Yes, I think it will be very cruel of you to leave me; but how can I help it, if you will be so unpatriotic?"

It was clear that Miss Bell was very indignant indeed.

* * * * *

Meantime, to go back a little, Di, whose future was thus being arranged for her, was travelling with her companions towards Granada.

They started one night late in April. At the last moment Ralph found that he could not go

with them, but he had been of the greatest use, Mrs. Henshaw said, addressing Deonys. The ladies, with their maid, had a compartment for themselves; while Felix and Mr. Ouvry elected to smoke. Ralph had seen to the luggage and got the tickets, he had also supplied them with literature for the journey. It was wonderful, considering that he was a bachelor and had no sister, how thoughtful he was. Mrs. Henshaw pointed out that you did not expect such delicate attentions from a man who had enjoyed so little of ladies' society.

"Perfume and flowers, and just the cakes you like best, Philippa. Perhaps Miss Ouvry will let you have some—just one or two tiny ones. No, my dear, you must not give me your flowers. Think how disappointed somebody would be!"

"Ralph meant them for us all," said Di, showering sweetmeats hastily into Philippa's lap; but Mrs. Henshaw shook her head. She was gracious, even playful, and not at all jealous. She spent many moments of the night, while Philippa slept and Di would fain have followed her example, in discoursing on Ralph's merits.

All the time they were journeying through La Mancha, its twirling wind-mills—those giants that the knight of sad countenance went forth to conquer—motionless and black against the faint moonlit sky. Di looked out at that sad

breadth of upland country, which is classic ground for every traveller, and listened, with what patience she could summon, to this praise of Ralph.

"We must wait for him," said the speaker. "I'll write him one of my little notes when we get to the hotel. Nobody ever refuses me. Business, did you say? Oh, he will come, never fear. There are stronger motives. When Philippa's poor dear papa was in love with me——" Then she launched into a long story, in the middle of which Di was rude enough to fall asleep.

At Menjibar they had breakfast. Mrs. Henshaw was not quite so amiable as before; but then, after a night journey, one needs to be young in order to maintain one's cheerful views of life.

Felix slipped out while the others still lingered at the table, and examined the resources of the diligence to which they were harnessing the long team of mules. A stout, elderly Spanish gentleman, wrapped in a cloak and smoking a cigarette, had taken a seat in the coupé; but there were still two vacant places.

He returned and went boldly up to Deonys.

"If you would care to sit in the coupé," he said, "there's room. You like the air, I know; and it's a good place for a view."

"The coupé?" said Di, so that everybody could hear. "Oh yes, it is the best place for a view. Philippa must sit there. I have seen it all before."

She turned away, and left the young man disconsolate and rather angry, if the truth must be told. Had he not carefully arranged his "traps," so that there should be room for only one other person? and here it was coolly proposed that he should take Philippa!

Di soon settled matters by seating herself inside the lumbering coach with her father and Mrs. Henshaw; and that lady, seeing her daughter about to mount the ladder brought out for her benefit, insisted, with much apparent anxiety, that Mr. Chester should look after her, and see that no disaster befell her.

"A strange gentleman, you know—isn't there room for Blake?"

"There isn't much room for any one. A small person would be best,' said Felix, his hopes reviving. (Blake was even taller than her young mistress.) But though he looked at Di, she never so much as turned her head. She was making some little arrangements for her father's comfort.

"There, padre," she said, "put your feet up here; I've plenty of room."

"Perhaps if your maid changed places with

me——," Felix began again, lingering at the window.

"I can't possibly do without her," said Mrs. Henshaw hastily. Then, confidentially, "I trust you to take care of my child."

Meanwhile Philippa had mounted nimbly.

"There's lots of room," she called out; and Felix, resigned to his fate, took his seat beside her.

"How ridiculous mamma is! As if I were likely to fall out! It was nice of Di to give me this place. It is very pleasant up here, don't you think?"

"Charming," he answered. But for the first ten minutes he was almost sulky.

So they travelled through fair Andalusia, climbing upwards by a road all bordered with flowers, the hills before them soft with quick-changing light and shadow.

At Jaen they stopped to dine—a sleepy place, with the silence and indolence of the East about its courts and palm-fringed gardens. Then on again in the same order as before; but now they drove under a snow of blossoming trees, and with the singing of the Jaen to make their music all the way.

By this time everybody was a little cross and tired. Mr. Ouvry and Mrs. Henshaw slumbered by fits and starts, and even the lively talk in

the coupé ceased; and there was no more interest to be got out of the straggling, wayward mules, or the muleteer's maledictions. Their fellow-passenger scattered sombre remarks, which neither of them cared to appropriate; then he, too, wrapped himself closer in the folds of his big cloak and fell asleep. Felix, disregarding the proprieties and leaving Philippa to her fate, got down once or twice to stretch his cramped limbs and gather a handful of flowers to pass in at the window by which Di sat.

As they neared their journey's end the country about them grew wilder, more rugged, with downward glimpses into valleys and hamlets where the shadows were falling fast. By-and-by the moon sailed up, and whitened all the path before them.

Felix had been walking for a long time, keeping pace easily with the diligence, for the mules were tired, and would no longer be spurred on by any threats of the mayoral. Di, who was not asleep, could see him from her corner. In a little while he came up and tapped softly on the glass. She rose, and lowered it with great caution.

"They are all asleep," she whispered.

"Can't you come out?" he asked, also speaking low.

She shook her head.

"It would disturb them."

"I wanted to look at Granada with you—for the first time," he said. "They tell me we shall see it in a moment—from the bridge."

She answered nothing as she leaned out. She still held the flowers he had gathered, and they scented the air. The moonlit spring night was very still about them; here and there were checkered bands of shadow, but the silver radiance seemed to grow and spread. Presently, across the vega, they saw the city shadowy and mysterious, crowning the heights, with a red light burning here and there, and behind it the dusky mass of the sierras relieved against the sky. They could hear a clock somewhere chiming eleven; there was no other sound except the jingle of the harness bells.

The city seemed asleep, and they had the whole wide world to themselves.

CHAPTER II.

"Et ego in Arcadiâ vixi."

"WHY wasn't I born four hundred years ago?" said Felix. "I might have been sultan here as well as another fellow."

"You would have made a capital sultan," said Philippa; "you are so magnificently idle."

"'Not to desire or admire, if a man could learn it, were more
Than to walk all day like the Sultan of old in a garden of spice,'"

said Mr. Ouvry, who could quote gracefully on occasion. He got up and went away slowly, leaving the young people to their raptures.

"Where are you going, padre?" Di sprang after him. She slid her hand through his arm.

"Only to read the newspapers."

"Newspapers!" said the girl wonderingly. It seemed to her strange that any one could care to follow the dry course of politics while he

might breathe at ease the large and liberal air of the Alhambra.

"Chester has lent me the *Times*—only a week old, this time. The legends are enough for you, eh? That's the way with you women, you care more for the oldest and mustiest love story than for the fate of a nation."

"Oh, but I haven't forgotten the fate of the nation," said Di, who had but yesterday seen the ragged Carlist prisoners taking exercise under guard in the deserted court of Philip's huge blunder. "There, I'll leave you in peace to read, padre, and you can tell me by-and-by what is going to happen to us."

But she did not immediately follow his advice and go back to her friends.

To feel to the full the strange spell of this dream palace one must be alone, or, at best, in the dim company of vanished caliphs and dark-eyed houris. She was best pleased to escape her companions for a little. She went and parted the myrtle hedge, and peeped at the gold-fish teeming in the basin; the water is clear and shows a double growth of slender shaft and arch; she dipped her fingers in it and stirred the ripples till the strange and ancient writing reflected in it wavered and grew indistinct.

It is all very solitary. The rough wall of the

Torre di Comares rises boldly at one end; within and beyond are other courts dimly seen, and furthest away of all a window in which a bit of azure sky is caught and framed.

Deonys sat down on the cool marble and looked about her at the faded splendour, the hints of past magnificence, the solemn invocations in strange tracery everywhere round her. She was thrilled and excited, and full of wondering admiration, and yet she was restless; the peace, the slumberous silence, the blank indifference to the life of to-day that meets you everywhere within these walls troubled her and somehow disturbed her serenity—or was it, perhaps, the light laughter that reached her carried on the clear still air? For once, Philippa's voice had an unwelcome sound.

When she went back to her companions, she found those two prosaic young people discussing the pleasures of idleness. Felix was hotly proving from poetic and other sources that it "hath its morality."

He was lying on his back, his head supported by his hands; while Philippa had seated herself—another Una—on one of the lions that surround the great marble basin in the court that bears their name. He looked up eagerly when Di appeared coming slowly through the gleaming forest of columns.

"Come and defend me," he said. He seldom called her by her name.

"Who is accusing you?" She drew a little nearer.

"His own conscience," said Philippa promptly, "if he has any left by this time. Can you imagine anything more shameful than lying in bed till ten o'clock—here of all places?"

"It's a well-known axiom that you can't burn your candle at both ends at once," he replied meekly. "I was consuming the midnight oil long after your light was out."

"Oh, I know. You were 'boiling down' Murray. Now, do you think there is any good in making hash of another person's mutton in that way? For my part, I like the joint best whole. I don't care for literary spoon meat. It's a poor compliment to my intellectual appetite."

"This, for instance," said Felix—he seized the guide-book and read. "'The court is an hypæthral quadrilateral oblong of twenty-six feet by seventy-three feet wide, and twenty-two and a half feet under the galleries.' There's a nice plain, bald statement for you. Our next duty is to pace it, and see whether the measurement is perfectly correct. If we could make it out a quarter of an inch wrong either way that would be so much kudos for us."

"You may go alone then—it's too hot—you may have all the glory to yourself. If I kept a diary I'd try to find something fresh to say."

"Did you ever try to write a book?"

"No. Don't you know it's the distinguished people who don't write books?"

"Well, it's a very wholesome experience," he observed, following with his eye the movements of a white dress passing now from sunshine into shadow. "I wrote one once."

"A tragedy in blank verse, no doubt. I've noticed that is what everybody begins with."

"I was rather proud of that performance. I rather expected that when it appeared it would make a small sensation. I had visions of editors scowling at each other on the stairs that lead to my rooms, and of printers' devils jostling each other in the lobby. I was prepared to be interviewed by the society journals as the coming man, you know——"

"Well—what came of it all?"

"Nothing came of it all," said Felix, solemnly. "That book disappeared mysteriously—it was strangled in the birth. It's a case of the 'survival of the fittest,' I suppose. I consoled myself with the remembrance that I was not the only aspiring genius doomed to silence."

"What a dreadful and most dismal world it

would be, if all the tragedies that are written were published!" said Philippa, meditatively. "Suppose some new-fledged M.P., burning to distinguish himself, brought in a bill making it compulsory on us all to read them! Here comes Di. I think we'll not tell Mr. Chester what he missed this morning, Di. We don't want our adventures to be ignominiously buried in an editor's waste paper basket."

"Not even if I promise to respect your mutton?" He spoke lazily, but he rose and went forward to the tazza. Di was leaning over it, staring absently at the water; he looked down at it too.

"Tell me about it," he said.

"This morning?" She straightened herself. "Oh, it was beautiful; it was too hot to sleep, so we got up as soon as it was light and went out. We came here by the Gate of Justice—that one with the hand and key carved on it, you know. It was dreadfully dark in the steep bit of road between the walls, and when we got to the place of Cisterns there was a sentry lying on a bench who looked just like one of the carved knights in the cathedral."

"Except that he was snoring," said Philippa.

"He never moved when we passed him. Then we got in by the little door, and it was like stepping out of to-day into yesterday. You

might have thought you were among the Moors again."

"Only"—Philippa again interrupted carelessly—"Moorish gentlemen didn't wear frock coats and tall hats and light kid gloves, did they?"

"Did you expect him to wear a turban?"

"He? Who is he?" said Felix, misliking the pronoun.

"That's a secret. No, Di; he is not to be told."

"Why not? There is nothing to hide. Just as we got into the Court of Myrtles we saw some one moving behind the pillars, and we were both a little startled; for it might have been a ghost, you know."

"Oh, a ghost," said Felix, comfortably. "So you met the fellow who haunts this place? Do the spectres hereabouts bow to the tyranny of public opinion in the matter of their 'get up'? A ghost in a frock coat and lavender kids—above all, a ghost in a tall hat——"

"But you are all wrong," said Di, laughingly; "it was a real man and a very fat one. I know him a little; and wasn't it odd that he should come here at the very same hour as we did?"

"Very odd indeed," said Felix gloomily.

"He said he saw us yesterday. He lives here, you know; we met him the last time."

"Oh, he lives here?" Felix began to hate the fellow on the spot. "Then he comes here often in the morning, I suppose."

"You had better get up to-morrow, and then perhaps you will see him too," said Philippa. "He speaks English very nicely, and he will tell you all the legends to put in your diary. I dare say he could call up spirits from the vasty deep for you too. He is very obliging. If there doesn't happen to be a story to fit your fancy, he'll make you one. He has a great deal of imagination—hasn't he, Di?"

"Oh, I don't know," she answered carelessly; and Felix began to brighten at once. "I didn't listen to him much. I think it would have been nicer if we had been alone. A man like that somehow makes beautiful things seem impossible."

"I should think so," said Felix, with great energy. "Whoever heard of a fellow getting himself up like that at four o'clock in the morning!"

"It was six; and I think it was very nice of him when he knew he was going to meet ladies."

"So he knew." Felix's voice grew grim once more.

"What nonsense, Philippa! How could he possibly tell that we were coming?" said Di

gravely. "And, after all, the time to see ghosts and to listen to the old stories is in the moonlight. I believe," she said, impressively, "if you come at the right hour you hear the strangest sounds—whisperings and murmurings and the clanking of chains—but the thing is to come at the right time."

"Let us come to-night," said Felix gaily; "there's moonlight if that is indispensable to his ghostship's appearing, and we can wait his pleasure."

"But there is more than one," said Philippa, with a little shudder; "there are ever so many. Don Juan Davila told us he had seen them. Didn't he, Di?"

"He said he had seen the whole of the Abencerrages," said Di, with a quaint little smile. "But you know you spoke about his imagination, Philippa."

"Why not a dozen as well as one? By all means let us have the whole lot. It is as well to go in for a big sensation when you are at it."

"I think it ought to be Boabdil who is not allowed to rest in his grave. It was he who beheaded them here—in the fountain." Di dipped her hand in the water that once ran red with the blood of an illustrious line; the drops trickled white and clear from her fingers.

"They say now it was another who did the

deed—not Boabdil at all; indeed, for all I know, they make the whole thing out to be a myth. They have a way nowadays of taking all the picturesqueness out of history."

"Oh, but this must be true, at least, for there are the blood-stains!" Di pointed to the dingy spots, precious to the cicerone, that dim the whiteness of the marble.

"Well, that is conclusive evidence, certainly," said Felix, with so much gravity that they all laughed.

Those were idle days that they spent in this Arcadia, where to be wise would have seemed the height of folly. Deonys gave herself up to the pleasure of the hour. If there was any little shadow on her happiness she strove to ignore it, and to enter heart and soul into the small jokes and repartees that pass current for the genuine coin of wit when one is young.

At lunch Mrs. Henshaw, who had been invisible all the morning, announced that she had news. Somebody was coming; an addition to their party; they must all guess.

"Not Miss Barbara?" said Felix, looking up with comic dismay.

"Oh, I know," said Di carelessly, before any-one else could speak; "it is Ralph. He told us he would come." She did not care for mysteries, and she resented Mrs. Henshaw's pointed smiles.

"Is that all?" said Philippa. "I've a bigger bit of news than that. Mrs. St. John has come already; I saw her arrive. Herr von Rosen is with her, and the count, and a waggon-load of boxes."

"I saw them, too. You forgot Mr. Meyers," said Di innocently.

This piece of intelligence, at least, made some impression.

Mr. Ouvry looked up with elevated eyebrows; Mrs. Henshaw was almost agitated.

"Are you sure?" she asked. "You might be mistaken. To have her following us; it is really most annoying. You may be mistaken, Philippa. You take such fancies."

"Not a fancy to Mrs. St. John," said Philippa, smiling. "But for your comfort, mamma, she has been patriotic enough to go to the Washington."

Nobody hailed this arrival with pleasure, unless it were Felix, who, cunning youth, saw in this large addition to their party new chances of companionship with Di. It is to be feared he had, at this time, little sympathy with the unfortunate Mr. Meyers; and was, indeed, cruel enough to find Mrs. Henshaw's fears very amusing. He had offered her his arm. They were all going downwards under the arching elms to visit the cathedral, which is seen from

afar, rising above the roofs and palms in the very heart of the city.

"If it was anybody else," she was saying confidentially. "But Philippa is so soft-hearted; and I call it really most ungentlemanly to persecute her and follow her about in this fashion."

Felix smiled. He thought that so long as Mr. Meyers confined his persecution to casting languishing glances from the safe distance of the Washington, it might be borne without discomfort.

"Ah! if you knew what an anxiety it is to a mother's heart! If I could but know that my child had some one to guide and protect her before I die!"

"Die!" said Felix, with brutal cheerfulness. "Oh, you must not talk of such sad things. Would you like me——" he hesitated, while a whimsical recollection of his former interference crossed his mind. "Shall I give Meyers a hint?" It seemed to him as if his mission in life was to administer hints to the lovers of Philippa.

Mrs. Henshaw shook her head softly. What an obtuse young man this was! "It is very likely only my silly fears," she said. "It is absurd to be so easily depressed—isn't it? But I was always so sensitive. If Philippa were like other girls—Miss Ouvry, for instance."

"Yes." Felix looked at her with sudden interest.

"Ah," said his companion airily, "it is easy to guess her little secret. We all know how that will end; and an excellent thing, too."

"I don't know what you mean." Felix forgot to be polite in his anxiety. He stopped full in the middle of the street.

"No?" Her smile was incredulous. "I think you are pretending." She looked at him archly. "Surely *you* must know. Why don't you ask her? That would be much the best way. Ask her, and she will tell you herself." He said nothing in reply. He passed with her into the cathedral and stared about him with the others. Mr. Ouvry was discoursing in a hushed voice about the position of the choir in the churches of Spain. There is a screen behind the high altar which they all paused to look at. Isabella is seen riding on a white horse between Ferdinand and Mendoza, behind her comes a long train of knights, ladies, soldiers, captives. Boabdil holds out the keys: it is the story of the conquest written in stone. Not far off are the effigies of these same Catholic kings, kneeling placid and calm through the ages; their dust rests in the crypt below, their triumphs are long over. At another moment these things might have stirred some interest in the breast of the young

man who looked and listened with the rest, but just now his mind was occupied with one urgent thought.

He looked at Mrs. Henshaw gratefully. He did not even think her aggravating when she patronized the pictures and the tombs, ticketing them, with her meaningless, "how pretty!" "how nice!" He thought her very clever to have guessed his secret. "Why don't you ask her yourself?" she had said. It was excellent advice. He had hardly expected her to give it, and he was properly grateful. It was good-natured of her to offer him such straightforward counsel. He began to think he had misjudged her.

They all went up the hill together, so that there was no further chance of confidential talk. It was almost dark under the thick, over-arching trees; but when they had reached the hanging gardens and paused to glance behind them, they saw that the little town with its gaily-painted houses, was still in full sunshine. The solemn verdure of the cypresses, and the feathery crowns of the palms stood out against the pale blue of the sky. Beyond the roofs and the orchards the vega stretched wide and silent and seemingly deserted, till some subtle change of light revealed in a flash the walls and towers of the conqueror's city, Santa Fé.

"Let us go in and have some tea," said Mrs. Henshaw. "What tiring work sight-seeing is! We have done nearly everything now, haven't we, Mr. Ouvry?"

"There's the Cartuja. The guide-books insist on your visiting it."

"What is it—a monastery? Oh, then you gentlemen will go alone, of course."

"Why of course?" said Philippa. "I delight in monasteries."

"There's a fine library. It is well worth a visit."

"I like the monks better than their musty parchments; and they are always very glad to see us, whatever they may pretend."

"Philippa!" said her mamma warningly.

"They don't get too much of ladies' society, certainly."

"I suppose you will tell me that is why they like it?" Philippa looked reproachfully at Mr. Ouvry.

"Of course we'll go," said Felix, before any one else could speak. "There are hundreds of things to see yet. One might spend years—a lifetime here, and not grow tired of it."

"Then perhaps you won't miss your English newspapers if I borrow them for an hour?" said Mr. Ouvry drily.

Felix stared at him; then he burst out

laughing. "I haven't opened one since I came," he said. "I'll fetch them."

In the evening while they all sat after dinner in the formal little garden, Mrs. St. John sailed across from the rival hotel.

She came with all her retinue, except the unhappy Mr. Meyers, who preferred solitary wretchedness. In his absence Mrs. Henshaw unbent a little—but only a little. Her insular prejudices objected to the lively American and her mode of travelling.

"Mr. St. John is not with you?" she questioned frigidly.

"No; he doesn't seem to care to go round with me to every place. He'll pick me up here, unless we go off to Seville without him. You are going there for Holy Week, of course?"

"The processions are not worth going to see, I believe," said Mrs. Henshaw, making up her mind on the spot; "and we have seen that sort of thing so often. We have travelled a great deal—my daughter and I."

"Well, your daughter would like it, I guess. She's like me—she likes going about and talking to people. There wasn't a soul left to talk to in Madrid. I'd have got sick if I had stayed there another hour."

"Philippa finds this place very improving.

There's so much for a cultivated mind to enjoy," said the older matron instructively.

"I dare say. But I guess she'll like going round better now that the gentlemen have come. I wanted Mr. Meyers to come with us, but he wouldn't. Now, I wonder why he wouldn't come! It's queer taste, isn't it, liking to be alone?" She stole a glance at Philippa as she spoke.

During this exchange of repartee Di sat a little apart. She looked enviously after her father, who presently slipped away to his room, and to the study of the *Times*. She was tired after the long, bright day—she whom nothing used to tire. Presently she felt a hand resting on the back of her chair, and a little thrill passed through her. But when Felix said to her, speaking very low—

"Do you remember your promise this morning? The moon is up now. I have been out to see."

"Oh, about the ghosts!" she answered, in a clear, high voice. "Yes, let us all go." She stood up and drew a light shawl she was wearing closer about her. "I am ready," she said, not looking at him. "Have you told the others?"

Philippa, who was talking to Herr von Rosen, looked up and nodded; and, after a

minute's discussion, everybody rose except Mrs. Henshaw, who excused herself.

They strolled through the gardens, musical with the silvery trickle of running waters, and passed the threshold of the little door that, as Di had said, divides Moorish yesterday from Spanish to-day.

"Well, now, who is going to tell the story?" said Mrs. St. John. "I declare I feel quite nervous already. What's that?"

They all listened, catching their breath a little, but no sound was to be heard. They were in the Court of Lions, and had gathered about the fountain. The moon had sailed up, and was shining on the floor in great white patches that were crossed here and there with bars of shadow. The tracery on the walls shimmered like a filmy curtain of lace—you might have thought that a breath would blow it aside and reveal a dark, sad-eyed face behind. The place was indeed full of shadowy company; but it was not the Abencerrages who went by dragging their chains.

"A love-story would be better," said some one. "The ghosts decline to appear. Spectres are shy of a crowd; there's safety from them in numbers."

"Have you heard the legend of the Lady of the Fountain?" said Herr von Rosen, looking

at Philippa. "It's a peautiful story; it is prettier dan ze Abencerrages."

"No. Won't you tell it us?"

He began at once, nothing loth. As they were most of them young, they ought, of course, to have been deeply interested in the woes of the fair lady who dropped tears of sorrow into the fountain, and thus broke the Moorish spell; but there are drawbacks to the charm of the most thrilling love-story, when it is told in very broken English, and I am afraid these irreverent listeners were secretly laughing at the baron's gutturals all the time.

"Well, I wouldn't cry for any man, I know," said Mrs. St. John, tossing her head, "though it did bring him back to me; but that lute, now, I shouldn't mind having that. I'd play it when I wanted to put Mr. St. John in a good humour."

"He could never be anything but amiable to you," said the count gallantly.

"But he is—he's cross sometimes. It's the way with them all, but *my* kind of playing doesn't seem to make him sweeter tempered. I guess there was something special about that lute. I wonder where it is now?"

"Listen! Don't you hear it? She is playing now," said Philippa, lifting one hand with an authoritative gesture.

There was music, indeed, which their voices and laughter had drowned, but it came faint and sweet from the heart of the misty, moonlit elms. It drew them away to the Hall of the Ambassadors, from whose deep embrasures they could look down on the sleeping town. The murmur of the Darro, dancing downwards, reached them; now and again a stray moonbeam caught its ripples. From the Albaicin on the other side of the valley came the faint tinkle of a convent bell; but these sounds seemed to hush themselves presently, as if all the world had conspired to keep silence that the one great wave of music might be better heard. For now on every side of them, throbbing through the night, rose and fell the chorus of the nightingales, sad and joyous, passionate and pleading.

"Let us go to the Tower and see the moonlight on the Nevada snows," said young Walter Tyne, a shy youth of eighteen, who was carrying Mrs. St. John's shawl. He blushed hotly as he spoke, but he recovered himself when everybody agreed it was the thing to do, and led the way boldly.

Di, who was leaning far out over the railing that protected the recess, did not hear this proposal. By-and-by the unusual silence forced itself upon her senses; when she looked up they were all gone. They had forgotten or not

missed her. She was not sorry to be left alone. She hated the chatter and laughter of her companions, it jarred upon her mood, and she could not but see that Herr von Rosen was constantly at Philippa's side. Was he to meet the same fate as Mr. Meyers, who had built all his hopes on a foundation of shifting sand? And Philippa, how could she endure the German's presence, his broken English, his broad compliments, when she had but to hold out her hand——. Di did not finish the sentence to herself. She stole out of her corner presently; it was too late to follow the others, even if she had known where they were. She listened a moment, but she could hear no sound of their steps or their voices. She was not afraid. Some one would surely miss her by-and-by and return. There was rest and soothing in the cool darkness; and outside the peaceful music of the nightingales had not ceased. She wandered through the deserted halls till she reached the Mirrador—that little boudoir of the Sultanas that looks down on the garden of the Lindaraxa, a neglected tangle where all sweet things grow uncared for now. The air that came in at the arched window was heavy with the scent of orange blossom and roses. She went and leaned her head against the cold stone, and shut her eyes. She was thinking of many things—of England

and her cousin, of Philippa and that promise given bravely and meant truly, "You may trust me."

When she heard a step she did not stir. She knew who it was—who alone, of all the gay company, had missed her and come to seek her here. Her heart seemed to contract and to stand still for a moment, but when Felix came up and laid his hand on the sill where her hand was resting, she said to him in quite her usual voice—

"I've been thinking it's a pity we can't stay here till the eve of St. John."

"Why till then?" he asked, but his voice was absent.

"You would see ghosts enough then," she said, with a smile. She leaned out and plucked a rose, pulling it to pieces, and watching the petals float slowly downwards.

"King Boabdil holds his court in a cave over there, under the mountains; and all his subjects crowd to do him homage. You see them riding quick as the wind, and the moonlight flashes on their armour, and on their still white faces. They have to make haste, you know, for they have only an hour or two of life; they must vanish before the dawn breaks till June comes round again. There's a popular ballad about it. I wonder if I can remember it——"

"I remember another story about St. John's day," he said quickly. "Have you never heard how lovers go out on Midsummer morning to gather flowers before the sun drinks up the dew, and do you know the meaning of that old custom; shall I tell it you?"

"I think we have a legend about that too," she said carelessly, intent on watching the last petal float away from her fingers. "What a lot of foolish old stories we have remembered to-day!"

"There is one more you must listen to; it is a true story this time." He laid his hand on hers that still rested so confidently on the carved stone of the window. "Di," he said, and all his heart was in his voice, "you will listen. Can't you guess? Don't you know that I love you?"

CHAPTER III.

"I summon up remembrance of past things."

When Malleson got Mrs. Henshaw's note he tossed it aside with a careless hand. "What is she up to now?" he wondered. She did not as a rule show herself very eager for his company. Ever since he had unwittingly disappointed her by failing to rise to her expectations, and come up to her standard in matters social, her behaviour to him had been tinged with a welcome coldness; now, for some mysterious reason of her own, she was almost effusive. One might believe that her pleasure in all the brave sights of the South was incomplete without his presence.

His thoughts about her were not very respectful; but, when ladies make requests, gentlemen must answer them politely. He wrote three lines, promising to join her party on a certain day. Before he journeyed to Granada he had a visit to pay. He went to see Mrs. Gordon, and he chose

the hour and the day when he felt pretty sure of Miss Barbara's inability to be present. Miss Barbara devoted certain moments of each week to what she called "tidying her drawers," a process full of mystery to him, but which he knew might not be lightly interrupted. He found Mrs. Gordon, as he had hoped, alone; the great, bare room was unshaded, and open to the untempered sunshine.

"I've come to ask you some questions," said Malleson, sitting down with his back to the light. These two understood each other too well to stand in need of any prelude to their talk.

"I think I can guess what they are, since you look so grave."

"I 'want to know,' like the young women in American fiction—well, there's a good deal I want to know. You are a very charitable person, but I warn you I'm not going to be melted by any appeals to my milk of human kindness—I haven't got any for that matter; it was all turned to gall long ago, and I'm determined to get to the bottom of this mystery."

"How fierce you look! Don't scowl at me like that!"

"I mean to be fierce."

"But there is no mystery—as far as I am concerned there is really nothing to tell.

And I 'want to know,' too. Have you any reason for asking this of me just now?"

"Reason enough. Mrs. Henshaw—you see I'm speaking of her with all respect—has been treating Di to various hints and allusions after the manner of women. I believe you would, most of you, be tortured rather than speak straight out."

"Do you call that respectful?" murmured Mrs. Gordon.

"I may be wrong," he said, forced to smile; "but in this case I think I am right, and when a lady takes to nods and becks and wreathed smiles—or frowns, rather—it's an instinct with me immediately to want to know what is behind."

"I don't see how you can help Di."

"Well, I'll try, at any rate."

He began to whistle very softly to himself in an absent fashion, staring over Mrs. Gordon's head at the wall.

"Why don't you begin?" he said, suddenly bringing his dark, keen eyes inquiringly upon her.

"Begin! What an inquisitor you would have made! Shake up my pillows and lift me a little, Ralph. I feel too much in your power."

He lifted her with great gentleness, and settled the cushions deftly, but he was inexorable.

"Now we are on equal terms," he said. "You see, I've not even asked leave to smoke, though you are indulgent to that bad habit of mine. You can begin your story as soon as you like."

"If it weren't for Di's sake—" she looked troubled—"it would be much better to forget all such old stories."

"Look here, I'll help you," he said. "Suppose you tell me the meaning of this unexplained and sentimental relation between the lady and Di's father—if it is sentimental. If Di is to have a stepmother it might be as well to prepare her mind for it gradually."

"A stepmother!" said Mrs. Gordon. "Oh, I am sure, I am quite sure you are mistaken. There never was a hint of an attachment between them long ago; and, Mr. Ouvry—I don't think he would marry her."

"She might marry him. It is done sometimes, I believe."

"Not when Di's father is the man." She smiled.

"I grant it doesn't seem likely. But stranger things have happened."

"I suppose I must tell you what I know. I am certain, at least, you are wrong in this fancy, and you will not let me rest till I set you right."

"What is done is not to do," said Ralph care-

lessly; "I've found proverbs an immense help in my journey through life."

Mrs. Gordon clasped her hands together for a moment. She seemed to study his dark keen face.

"You can trust me, you know," he said, with a sudden smile that transfigured it. She began then without further protest.

"Mrs. Henshaw was a Miss Blake," she said. "I knew her long ago in her girlhood; we had gone then to live at Whitethorpe, in Essex. That was before I knew my Harry." She paused an instant, then she went on: "It was hardly more than a village, though it called itself a town, and we soon knew everything about each other. The Blakes were the big people of the place; Mr. Blake was both lawyer and banker, and we poor new-comers looked upon him as a sort of millionaire. Miss Blake was talked of as an heiress, and she visited a good deal in the county; I remember we used to envy her when she was asked to the balls at Colchester. Pleasures were fewer then, and a season in London was beyond the most audacious dream."

He saw how reluctant she was to reach the vital point in her story, and he let her tell it in her own way. There was pain for her, too, in this summoning up of past things. "She was

very pretty," she continued, "with Philippa's beautiful colour and slim, straight figure; but there was a young girl who was brought up with her whom we all liked a great deal better."

"Who was she?"

"Di's mother," said Mrs. Gordon, quietly.

"Di's mother?" he echoed, taken by surprise. "They were brought up together!"

"She was an orphan, and a ward of Mr. Blake's. I suppose she was not nearly so handsome as Miss Blake, but we never thought of that. She was the brightest, merriest sprite I ever knew; and we all, boys and girls alike, fell in love with her."

"And of course she was despised and ill-used at home," said Ralph nonchalantly. "It's the old story of fiction—Cinderella among the ashes and the step-sisters queening it at the ball. You needn't bother to go into details."

"No, there was nothing of that kind—they treated her perfectly well. Mr. Blake was really fond of her, and Mrs. Blake had a great deal of superficial good nature. I remember my mother and the other matrons used to hold her up as a model of impartiality, and you can suppose they were not uncritical. The girls were always dressed alike, and went everywhere together; and, considering that Mary Burton had no money of her own, that really implied some

generosity. Mary used to fly about after Charlotte Blake, and do all her errands, but that was out of pure goodwill. She was the most unselfish creature I have ever known; and then Charlotte had a way of getting what she wanted—we all gave in to her."

"The child is mother of the woman," said Ralph softly. "And now we are coming to the glass slipper business. Ouvry was the prince, I suppose? There's no accounting for the tastes of women."

"I have told my story very badly," she continued, not heeding his comment; "for I have never said anything about the Kings. Dr. King had the next best house to the Blakes, and he was of much better family. There was a great household of boys and girls; but Alec was the eldest, and our chief ally. I told you all the boys were in love with Mary Burton—my brother Tom, the clerks at the Bank, and the young curates; those of them, at least, who were not attracted by Miss Blake's pretty face and her fabled fortune. It wasn't very serious with Tom, poor Tom was always taking a fancy to some new girl," she said, with a smile and a sigh for those old vanished days. "I believe he exchanged locks of hair and sentimental verses with every one of the King girls in turn, and even with Charlotte Blake; but with

Alec King it was very different—it was once for all with him."

"We have arrived at the prince, then?"

"Poor Alec! How often I have wished to see him again, and to ask his pardon for the hard thoughts I had of him. But that was all afterwards, and I am rambling as usual. I used to contrive meetings for them under the big laurel hedge, and smuggle letters between them," she said with her tender smile. There wasn't the smallest need for concealment, for everybody knew about their fancy for each other, but it sounded more romantic. We were young and silly, I dare say; and we thought an interview to which we stole out, wrapped in big cloaks, with the hoods drawn over our heads, was a much finer thing than a chat in the prosaic comfort of the parlour. I had met Harry then, and I thought lovers the most interesting creatures in the world. Alec's people and the Blakes looked on it as a mere boy and girl fancy. I want you to remember this. There was no talk of an engagement; they were both so young, and Alec had his way to make in life—he was going to India. But, though the elders shook their heads and talked of the short life of most first loves and the imprudence of early entanglements, some of us presumed to know better. I have not

made you understand Mary Burton at all unless you have realized how steadfast a nature hers was, in spite of its gentleness, and Alec was worthy of her. I remember very vividly their parting; there was no elaborate exchange of vows, but we knew that they would be true to each other, and Mary considered herself as much bound up with Alec's fortunes as I was with my Harry's.

"I think we were all rather uncomfortable before he sailed for India; and perhaps it wasn't purely romance that made us encourage those meetings in the garden. I don't know how we came to find out Charlotte Blake's secret, but I know that it was plain to everybody except Alec and Mary. It would not have been considered a good match for Charlotte, for the Kings were poor; but if Alec had but chosen her instead of Mary, I believe she would have clung to him through everything. I have often thought he might have made a good woman of her."

"Then Mr. Alec King must be cleverer than most men."

"Ah, you don't understand; love can work miracles. But, then he did not love her, you see."

"And so she hated him. I understand."

"She came to consider herself badly used—

at least, she grew to think so in after years; and Mrs. Blake, I believe, thought so too."

"Now we are coming to the persecution."

No, there was no open unkindness. They were just the same to Mary, or, if they were colder, she was too absorbed or too generous to notice it. Mrs. Blake used to pet and make of Charlotte more than ever, but that was all. Alec had gone away by this time, and when we heard that there was a strange young man coming to manage the Bank, we all hoped that he might fall in love with Charlotte Blake, and give a new direction to her thoughts. She liked people to admire her, and—well, hitherto one had done as well as another. How were we to guess that this was the one true emotion of her life? I'm afraid we thought chiefly of Mary's comfort, when we tried to provide her with a new admirer. But when he came——"

"He, being Ouvry?"

"Yes. Well, he fell in love with nobody."

"He was already in love with himself, no doubt."

"He was a surprise to us all, with his cold, soft ways. Somehow I think young men were more ardent long ago, and we could not understand how any one could help liking the King girls and blithe Mary Burton. He didn't even seem to admire Charlotte Blake's beauty, or

scarcely to notice her, though he was much in her father's house. The only person who got on with him at all was Mr. Blake, who thought him a very clever young man—indeed, we were all a little afraid of his cleverness, we heard so much about it. At this time Mary grew rather grave and sad, for Alec's letters stopped suddenly."

"I see. No letters ever came, I suppose?"

"None, after the first. She waited three years. My Harry and I had married long before this, and had left Whitethorpe. We only came back at intervals; and every time I saw Mary she seemed to me more pale and spiritless. All sorts of sad changes seemed to come at once, for Dr. King died suddenly, before Alec reached India, and the family went to live near Mrs. King's friends, in the north of Scotland, so that they quite dropped out of our lives. Charlotte Blake was the only one of us who corresponded with the girls. I had no time for letter-writing, and Mary had no heart for it; so the half-yearly epistles fell to Charlotte. I remember well how she came to me one day, on my last visit to my old home, and told me that Alec had written to his mother that 'he had changed his mind,' and that his engagement, if they had held it one, was to be considered at an end. Charlotte was agitated,

and I recall vividly yet the look of half-triumph, half-dread in her eyes. The Kings thought he had behaved very badly, but no words can express my indignation and disappointment. I had believed Alec to be as honourable and true as my Harry, and 'he had changed his mind!' Mary took it very quietly. She had strength enough left to suffer in silence. The next thing I heard was that she was going to marry Mr. Ovvry. I can't tell you how sad this news made me. There was no pretence of love on her side; and he—you could never tell what he felt—but I could not persuade myself he cared for her. I wrote and remonstrated as strongly as I dared, though I knew it was of no use. She said they all urged her, and—what better could she do? I know now, and I think I knew even then that nothing can justify a loveless marriage; but I can understand the prompting to self-sacrifice that made it possible for her—the desire that another life should not be spoiled as hers had been spoiled."

"And he represented to her that his life would be spoiled, as you put it, unless she consented?"

"I know that he did press his claim. Sometimes I wonder if, after all, he did not really love her, once."

"We may give him the benefit of the doubt, till we arrive at the real motive."

"There were plenty of people to show her what they thought to be her duty," she went on, too absorbed to notice his sneer. "Everybody said it was a good thing for her—a girl who had been jilted—to make so excellent a marriage; and pointed to his business qualifications and his cleverness, and spoke of him as Mr. Blake's successor. But that time was altogether full of surprises, for they went off the very hour of the marriage; and the next thing we heard was that they intended to settle abroad."

"So far it is all plain enough," said Malleson, rising and beginning to pace the room. "It's the old plot that has been done to death in third-rate novels. One young lady has been overlooked and wounded in her tenderest feelings, etc., etc.; and, in order to punish her rival, she writes a letter, in her name, to the young man, giving him up—for no reason in particular—and, being in league with her mother, she easily enough suppresses the fervent and frantic appeals he sends by return of post. I used to have a great contempt for novels of that order, but I shall respect them in future; for it seems to me you Whitethorpe people were as blind and as credulous every whit as the

heroes and heroines I made bold to despise. Then old King dies at the critical moment, and the family migrates. It never occurs to young King to correspond with any of his old acquaintances, and so to arrive at the truth; and none of the rest of you, who professed so much liking for the young man, has the sense to write direct and demand what the fellow means by his abominable conduct. It all accords exactly with the accepted rules of fiction; a little common-sense is all that is wanted to sweep away your mysteries and misunderstandings, but it is not forthcoming."

"But I wrote to him," Mrs. Gordon protested with energy. "I wrote him a dreadful letter. Harry said it was too fierce, but I made him let me send it. I never got an answer. Travelling was a very different matter in those days from these, and very likely it never reached him. It is very easy for you to criticise our actions now; but you know that in life as well as in books, suspicion and distrust may spring from very little seeds. We none of us for a moment suspected the real reason of Alec's silence. I did not know it till years later."

"Yet you took it for granted that he was in fault. You preferred to lay the blame on a man you had always believed to be honourable

and worthy of trust, and who could not defend himself. It's a little way you women have."

"Ralph, don't be so cynical. Wouldn't it have been just as bad to suspect the others? Worse, indeed, for they were women, and one of them a young girl. Besides, on the face of it, Alec was to be blamed. Don't you see how natural it was to think him fickle? Men are not always all that we foolish women at first believe them."

"A Roland for my Oliver," he said, with a smile. "Well, never mind all that now. I dare say Mr. Alec deserved a good deal of what he got. We have heard the whole story; and now I want the reason, the motive."

"The motive?"

"Ouvry's motive for marrying Miss Burton. We need not waste our time with discussing the remote chance of his being in love with her, for he wasn't. Why, then, did he do it?"

"I don't know."

"Had she money?"

"None at all, I believe, except what Mr. Blake allowed her. Oh, Ralph, I hate to think about it; but you know Charlotte Blake wanted Mary Burton out of the way. Perhaps she thought that in time Alec might turn to her."

"*Her* motive is easily seen," he said contemptuously. "It was a woman's weak device

to accomplish her desire, and it would most certainly fail—as it did fail, seemingly. A man would be a fool indeed who could be blinded to that extent."

"I think it might have succeeded—if he had come home in time. Alec King was a man who could not believe in a woman being anything but pure and good."

"Even though she threw him over! Well, Ouvry, at least, isn't one of these transcendental people. He is not the man to sacrifice himself out of pure good nature; and I want to know what he gained by removing this obstacle out of Miss Blake's path?"

"I don't know," she said again, more faintly. "There were rumours that he had got into difficulties."

"And the thing was hushed up on consideration of his marrying Miss Burton? You Whitethorpe people had a fine standard of morality!"

"It was only a rumour, and I never tried to find out the truth of it. It is horrible to me to live in constant suspicion. And Mary never breathed a word to me; she was very noble."

"Ah!" he said grimly, "I shouldn't have stopped there; I should have followed up the clue."

"No, you would not," she contradicted him gently.

She looked at his dark face, but she knew that he would have been merciful—that somewhere within him was a strong fibre of compassion that in the end would have conquered. He was the last man to hunt another down—he who knew, by sorrowful experience, how hard it is for stumbling feet to keep the upward path.

"Was she—of course she was—unhappy?"

"There was no sacredness—there could be no love in her married life—and she must very soon have found out that she had sacrificed herself for a dream. But he was not unkind to her—you must remember that."

"He did not beat her or starve her, you mean! Of course she found out the kind service her friends had done her?"

"Alec King came home. She wrote to him, but she never saw him."

"And he didn't come to defend himself?"

"It would have been too late. I sent the letter to him after her death."

"It seems to me you all used him very badly."

"Ah, you did not know Di's mother. It was her wish. She had a noble spirit; and though she suffered a slow anguish from the time he

left her, she never complained. She did her duty faithfully; and it was not till the end, when no harm could come of it, that she wrote to him. I never knew the secrets of her married life; it was only at the last she confided in me."

"And she told you this story?"

"Very little of it. She believed, or tried to believe, to the end, that there had been some strange blunder. I suppose, in those sad years of her married life, she began to understand things more clearly. But it was from Alec himself I learned the true reason of his silence. It was the mother who wrote to him. I told you she took Charlotte's part. She told him he was standing in the way of Mary's happiness; that, but for his shadowy claim, there was a man who would come forward."

"Ouvry, of course?"

"Yes. She was a good-tempered and not over-scrupulous woman; and I think she must have persuaded herself she was speaking the truth."

"Self-deception seems to have been a sort of fine-art in your village. I confess I don't understand your ultra-magnanimity. Will you tell me how—knowing all this,—you allowed this woman to come here, and encouraged Philippa Henshaw to be intimate with Di? I don't ask how, in the first instance, you came to tolerate

Ouvry; yet, if you could do that, I dare say the rest came easy."

"How you scold! Don't you see, I had to do it for Di's sake? We can't choose our circumstances in life. Mine placed me here, where I might be a friend to the child. Surely you would not have me begin by telling her all this—her mother's sorrow and her father's shame?"

"She ought not to care for him. It's preposterous."

"But she does; and, say what you will of him, he has been a good father to her. As for Mrs. Henshaw, I can't think how she made up her mind to come; but since she did, it was not for me to prevent her. She does not dream that I know anything of all that I have told you; and since I couldn't very well confront her with the story, I thought the best thing I could do was to keep silence."

"She never came to see you?"

"No. We were never great friends. And, after all, it was but a year or two of my life I spent at Whitethorpe, though it was such an eventful time. I dare say she had almost forgotten me. But she did not forbid Philippa to come."

"She knows nothing?"

"Philippa? Nothing, I am certain."

"And Di's peace—do you suppose it is very secure in Mrs. Henshaw's keeping?"

"She has the strongest motives for maintaining silence. And you forget how very long ago it is since all this occurred, and how easily one comes to be at home with even the uglinesses of one's past. I have never seen Charlotte Blake since I left Whitethorpe. Old Mr. Blake died soon after, leaving his affairs in the greatest confusion. His wealth turned out to be a mere fable. Afterwards I heard of Charlotte's marriage, and of her child's birth, and then of her widowhood. We had come here then, Harry and I were going to Malaga; they said it was his last chance. He had a wish to come this way, and to carry out our old dream of seeing Spain together. We got here and—you know the rest. Barbara came to me; and we just lived on, to be near where my Harry was, and partly for Mary Ouvry's sake. I was stronger then, and I was with her when Di was born. She just lived long enough to grow very fond of her. Di spent most of the first year of her life here, on the sofa beside me."

"Miss Barbara," he asked after a pause, "how much does she know?"

"No one could have mistaken Mary Ouvry for a happy woman. Barbara knew nothing, and for what she may have guessed, she is to

be trusted. She took wonderfully to poor Mary."

"Well, it seems to me you have kept the affair pretty close; and I see no reason why any knowledge of it should reach Di, if Mrs. Henshaw can be made to give up her cherished habit of dropping vague hints."

"There is Alec King."

"Oh, so there's Alec King! And how much is he likely to tell, if he turns up next?"

"Nothing to hurt Di. Can't you understand, Ralph? he was like Mary; and, besides, he knows only half the story."

"They were a precious pair of quixotic young —— There, why do you look at me like that? Don't you know that I must abuse somebody? Well, I'll take myself off and get it out alone."

"Ralph," she said, "come here."

He went to her and took her hand.

"You must trust me," he said. "You think I feel nothing."

"I know what you feel," she said gently. "Haven't I felt it myself?"

"And yet you kept silence all these years."

"It may have been cowardly to keep silence; it may have been encouraging wrong. I don't know, but there are so many to think of. I did it for the best."

"I did not mean to scold you," he said, with a smile.

"I know that. It would be easier to bear wrong if we could always speak out our feelings about it, but there are so many whom that would hurt."

"That is putting tenderness before truth."

"Perhaps it is. I can't argue, but I know that we can't each of us lay claim to the whole list of moral virtues, and I must choose to follow the leading of the one that seems to be the least harmful to others. I can do no good by preaching to Mr. Ouvry, but if by my silence I can shield Di, who has done no wrong—— Oh, Ralph, you will think of her? He is her father, and she is dear to him." He gave a little impatient movement; but she held his hand in her firm clasp.

"Coldness to him would pain her; and, as for Philippa's mother, let Di keep her innocence of evil."

"You may trust me," he said. "I suppose one must consent to forget it, for her sake. I had to know it—if only that I might keep all knowledge of it from her, and besides—— "

"And, besides, you love her; as we all do."

CHAPTER IV.

"L'Amour, vous le savez, cause une peine extrême."

It was with this story fresh in his mind that he went to Granada. He had a burning desire to face the two people who had conspired long ago to break a girl's heart. He might let no words pass his lips, but it seemed to him as if the fire in his eyes must scorch them.

In his scathing contempt he judged too hardly both the doers of this long-forgotten deed. He pictured them plotting it in cold blood. He did not consider how rarely our acts are the result of any subtle and careful calculation; how much more often they are the offspring of a momentary impulse, yielded to in haste. Mrs. Henshaw had long ago forgiven herself for her share in the transaction; more than this, she had persuaded herself that it was she who had paid the whole price of sorrow. She had staked her all, and she had lost. By degrees the past had come to wear this one

aspect. She would have denied with indignant anger that she had defrauded another of the love that was her due; it was she, rather, to whom love had been false. She had done nothing. In a literal sense this was true. It was the mother who, jealous for her child, had written the words of dismissal, and suppressed Alec King's remonstrances; who had pointed out that she was doing Mary Burton the truest kindness in freeing her from ties that might have grown irksome, and providing her with a suitable husband. Charlotte Blake had been passive, had allowed herself to be led without protest by the stronger will; and to one of her fibre this silent consent took no look of a sin. Sins in her eyes were those large breaches of the law against which the commandments speak out broadly, and from which she prayed Sunday by Sunday to be delivered. If she held herself to be guilty, could she have come to Madrid, into the presence of the only person who shared her secret? Certainly Mr. Ouvry, in that soft voice of his, could make her uncomfortable at times; but she quickly recovered, with the self-justification that he had more to remember than she.

These excuses or palliations were not at all likely to occur to Malleson, at least while his wrath burned hot. It was with Mrs. Henshaw

he was chiefly occupied. That a man should give his vices full swing, and yield to the basest and paltriest promptings was nothing so new; but a woman—woman to whom man looks up as to something beyond himself, as set above gross sin and temptation, living in an air purer than he breathes—— And it was into this woman's care and keeping that Di was to be given.

Full of such burdening thoughts, he climbed the hill that winds steeply under the arching elms. Hardly a ray of silver pierced the green canopy; the time of nightingales was not yet. He did not notice the beauty of the night; its intense stillness served only to accentuate his anger. There was nothing to distract it. It was only when he had breasted the slope and neared the end of his walk that he reminded himself he had not come on any mission of vengeance, but only to say good-bye to a young person whom he chose to call his ward, and that it behoved him to look a little less grim unless he would frighten her.

He had but a moment emerged from the shadow of the trees when he saw a white figure before him, flitting about in the moonlight with a certain graceful and rhythmic motion. He was instinctively reminded of the weird German legend of the dead dancers. The time

and the place lent themselves to this uncanny fancy.

"Di!" he called out. "Come here, you will-o'-the-wisp."

The dancer paused, and then advanced slowly towards him. It was not Di; it was, as he saw in a moment, Philippa.

"I was trying to remember a step I saw the peasants dancing," she said. "We didn't expect you so soon."

"I took you for one of the Willis' maidens."

"Who were they?"

"Young ladies who died before they had secured a husband."

She looked at him for a moment, but she made no direct answer. She was so pretty in her white summer robes that she might have softened a harder heart than his; but he was in no mood to be mollified by gracious looks, especially when these came from Mrs. Henshaw's daughter.

"I was lonely," she remarked, "and did it to keep up my spirits."

"Why are you alone? Where is Di? I think she might have come to meet me."

"She has a headache," Philippa answered, "and she is lying down. She has been on the sofa all the afternoon, or I dare say she would have met you."

"A headache! I never knew her to be afflicted with fine-lady complaints. What have you been doing to her?"

He turned on her almost roughly. He felt that he was bearish, unkind, unjust—that he was visiting his anger on the wrong person; but for the moment he could not disassociate Philippa from her mother.

"I think you are hard," she said, in a voice that vibrated with some suppressed feeling. "What have we done that you should mistrust us as you do, and misconstrue all our actions? You speak as if you thought we meant to hurt Di—to do her a wrong!"

Her tone surprised him. He had not expected her to answer like this. He had no clue to the circumstances that prompted her words, and he found nothing to reply.

"Any one who proposed to do that would have to reckon with me," he said as carelessly as he could.

"She is well off to have such a champion." She spoke in all earnestness.

"She has nobody else, you see; that is why I am so fierce in her cause. And where is Master Felix? Has he got a headache, too?"

"I don't know where he is. He is out walking somewhere, I think." There was a measure of reserve in her voice. "Haven't you brought

any news?" she asked, as if hasting from an unwelcome topic.

"A lovers' quarrel," he thought; but he answered aloud, "News? Yes. You are deeply interested in the elections, of course; so you will be glad to hear that the minimum age of voters has been reduced to twenty-one years, so that the advocates of the Federal Republic——"

"Oh, politics! I think you had better not waste all that on me. Mr. Ouvry will be a much better listener; he has done nothing but read newspapers since we came. Come in; they will all be delighted to see you. I'll tell Di you are here."

As she had said, they were all delighted to see him; and, had he been in a more genial frame, he might have felt flattered by the warmth of his reception. Philippa walked in before him. "Here is Mr. Malleson," she said laconically.

She stood aside, but he had barely crossed the threshold when Mrs. Henshaw rose gracefully to meet him. She took him by both hands.

"I knew you would come!" she exclaimed. "Nobody ever refuses me. I knew one of my little notes would bring you."

"Oh yes, it brought me," he said civilly; "that and other things."

"The other things being Di," said Philippa, smiling at him. "Mamma, Mr. Malleson thinks Di must stand in need of his championship."

"She is to be envied in having such a faithful friend," said the lady, smiling sweetly; "go and tell her, my dear, that Mr. Malleson is here. I dare say she will join us now."

Mr. Ouvry button-holed the new-comer, and drew him into one of the windows.

"I've been longing for a talk," he said in tones that were for him enthusiastic. "For a little sense——" He glanced behind him, and raised his delicate eyebrows with a significant air. "You heard Castelar on the Abolition Bill, of course? That was an opportunity to envy him. It is honour enough for a lifetime, if he had never uttered another word."

"I think I'll go and wash off the stains of travel," said Malleson, breaking away. "And perhaps Mrs. Henshaw will order some supper."

"I'll choose a delightful little meal," she said graciously. "I always take great pains for my favourites, and Di shall tell me what you like best."

When he was alone in his room he laughed aloud in derision of himself. He had imagined he should abash them with the anger of his eyes; and they only wondered if he felt tired, or if his head ached with the rattling of the

train, and wasn't he glad to leave Madrid? And one of them had talked admiringly and with envy of another's opportunities for the pleading of a righteous cause. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I set it down
That one may smile, and smile and be a villain,"

he said to himself between the applications of cold water and fierce towelling. He forgot to reckon that Mr. Ouvry failed to look upon himself as a dishonoured man, who ought to quail before the glance of his fellows. The story was new to Malleson, but it was twenty-five years old and more to Mr. Ouvry, and in a quarter of a century one has time to get over a good deal of ashamed feeling.

When he went down again the supper was ready for him, but no Di was there.

"She sends you her love," said Philippa, answering his disappointed glance round the room; "and she will see you to-morrow."

"What a pity she has a headache to-night, of all nights! It is the heat. I suffer just the same way myself; I have to take the greatest precautions. Did you take her my smelling salts, Philippa? It's a cold welcome for you, Mr. Malleson; Mr. Chester absent, too! We must keep some supper for him, poor fellow!"

"Where is Felix, then?"

"He has deserted us—really quite forsaken us all day long. Perhaps he is tired of us!" said Mrs. Henshaw archly.

Malleson privately thought it extremely probable.

"He's writing sonnets to the moon, no doubt; these young fellows are so romantic." Mr. Ouvry smiled indulgently.

"What is all this about the action of the *ayuntamientos* in Estremadura, this attempt at repartition? Doing it to save the Assembly the trouble, they will say, eh?" He turned to Malleson.

"There is something to be said on their side. They are ground to the earth with the contributions demanded by the State; while the men who hadn't an ochavito to bless themselves with before the sequestration of the monastic lands are rolling in wealth. Look at Rivero; where was he, even three years ago?"

They plunged into the topics that were the talk of the day. Malleson was full of fierce party spirit that night, and roundly abused the other side. He felt that it was his only safety; it gave an escape valve to his wrath, and it kept him from subjects more full of danger. For the sake of Di upstairs, for the sake of his promise, he must hide his knowledge in his heart and make no sign. Framing an excuse of business

still to be done, he went early to his room. He noticed that they had put him into one adjoining that which Felix occupied. The door of communication was open, and some of that young man's possessions were strewed about. He appropriated a pair of slippers, and lit his pipe. He determined to wait for the lad; the sight of his bright face would do him good. Clearing a little space on the table, littered with books and maps and other articles less conducive to study, he drew forward the ink and began to write to save himself from taking too poor a view of human nature. But the article which was to be contributed to an English magazine did not prosper; it dragged heavily, and might certainly be charged with the crime of dulness. Presently he threw down the pen and began to think what he could best do for Di; and whether even now, at this late hour, he might not claim her and so for ever make it his right to stand between her and the buffets of the world. It was a thought that had lurked in his mind all day as he journeyed south, but he had not given it permission to come boldly forward till now.

He had wanted her to have her chances. It was right and fair that every creature should have his honest share of chances in this life, where happiness is so insecure a possession. She ought to have time to choose—time to know the

secret of her own heart. But now he had to think what would be best and securest for her. He was a long time in making up his mind; he tried honestly to put himself and his desires out of the question altogether, and to think only of her good; but when he succeeded in the end in assuring himself that to claim her was the only way to keep her innocent of her father's past, he was conscious of a great exhilaration. No more boiling over of virtuous indignation; no more dark schemes of playing the part of an avenging Nemesis. He, too, was about to have his chances, and something told him that this time, after her many frowns, Fortune would smile on him. He even began to sing snatches of song, though he had less music in him than a raven, and only refrained because the perfect stillness all about him made him suddenly aware that the household was abed.

Felix was very tardy. He looked at his watch. It was one o'clock, and only those late revellers, the nightingales, were abroad. In his own new-born and full content, Malleson began to pity the boy. It must be a serious affair indeed, this lovers' tiff, since it could wrest sleep from the laziest of young men. While he was thinking of consoling phrases he heard the step he waited for. Felix let himself in, and came upstairs heavily, quite reckless of other people's slumber.

"Well, old fellow!" said Malleson, bent on being cheerful.

"Well," said Felix, in his turn; and it is impossible to express the amount of gloom conveyed in this little word.

"I waited up for you," Malleson went on, with the most elaborate pretence of considering this a cordial welcome. "You're late. They all went off hours ago. They left some food for you, I believe."

"Food!" Felix echoed with derision. "I don't care if I never eat again!"

This, from a young man whose appetite was one of his strong points, could not be received in silence.

"What is it?" said Malleson, going up and laying his hand on the other's shoulder. "You've had a—quarrel, eh? Well, cheer up. I've seen the young lady, and I fancy she is penitent."

"You've seen her?"

"Certainly. I had the pleasure of her company all the evening. I thought she was a little bit dull; so cheer up, you'll make it up to-morrow." In his heart he was not sorry that the two had fallen out. It was time the boy made an end of this fooling. Malleson took cynical views at this time of every woman but one. "You'll come out of it all right, you know."

"Come out of it!" Felix turned on him fiercely. "You don't know what you are talking about. I tell you she has refused me."

Malleson gave vent to a low whistle of astonishment. He had not looked for anything so good as this. He was inhuman enough to rejoice in secret over his friend's blighted hopes. So that was the meaning of Miss Philippa's strange humour!

"Refused you!"

"Well, aren't my words plain enough? Hers were. She would have none of me; and she was right enough," he said, with a sudden change to dejection. "I'm not worthy to brush the dust off her shoes." He flung himself on the bed and hid his face.

"She has played a nice little game with you," said Malleson, thinking to be consolatory. "My dear boy, you are well out of this. She's not good enough for you. You'll think so too, after a bit, when you have got over this." He could hardly have shot more amiss, since what sufferer from this disease ever thanked you for prophesying his recovery?

"Played with me! not worthy of me! Confound you, how dare you talk like that?" said Felix, looking up and glaring at him. "You insult her. You, who thought nothing too good for her."

"I?" said Malleson, mildly astonished, but prepared to be a model of patience and forbearance. "I don't remember. Of course I have always admired Miss Henshaw; any one with two eyes in his head can see that she is uncommonly pretty, and——"

"Miss Henshaw!" said Felix with weary impatience, turning away his head. "What has she got to do with it?"

"I thought she had everything to do with it." He spoke quietly, but a sudden dark doubt entered his mind.

"She?" Felix may, under the circumstances, be pardoned the scornful emphasis he laid on the word. "As if they were to be compared! As if there was any one in all the world to be compared with her! Oh, my love, you would not look at me—you would not listen!" He dropped his face in his hands again with a groan. Be it remembered he was very young, and that he was not quite without precedent in concluding that he had bidden farewell to all life's joys.

"Who are you talking about?" said Ralph sternly.

"I am talking about Miss Ouvry. You will please to speak respectfully of her in future," said the boy hotly.

Malleson had a horrible prevision that he

should hear this name; and yet, when it was spoken aloud, it sent the blood back to his heart and set his pulses leaping.

"Look here," he said; and this time it was his turn to be grim. He went and shook Felix roughly by the shoulder. "Listen!" he said; "I don't pretend to understand your tactics, but it seems to me you have behaved abominably. Do you call it the part of a gentleman to play fast and loose like that? To pay such notorious attentions to one girl, that your names are on everybody's lips, and then to turn about and go with your shallow pretence of love to another?"

"Pooh! what is the use of talking like that?" said Felix impatiently. "You are only wasting your breath. Love! What do you know about it!" Even in his rage, disappointment, despair, he found time to smile with derision at the thought of the cold-blooded and cynical Ralph instructing him in the ways of the heart. "I never loved but one woman in my life. I never loved till I knew her, and now I must go away; I must do without her."

"Do without her? I should think so!" Malleson spoke with deep anger as he paced the room. Here was no laughing matter, indeed; there was nothing comic in this returning of his own tremors, his own doubts and hesitations upon him. "What right had you to expect so great a

blessing? You who saw her for the first time a month ago? What have you done that she should put such a treasure in your hands?"

"I know it," said Felix brokenly, with another swift change to humility. Had he not already spent some dismal hours facing his own shortcomings, holding audience with his failures? "But I meant to be worthy of her, it would have been something to live for, and now——"

"And now you will find a new object in life. You will probably find consolation not so difficult," said Ralph with biting sarcasm. "A week or two, and we shall have you raving over some new fancy."

Felix looked up at him with dull eyes, he did not break out into recrimination.

"You don't understand," he said with a certain odd simplicity; "you think it is like the other times."

"I think it is very probably like the other times."

"It is not. I tell you I shall never care for any one again. Never!"

"I have heard all that before."

"And Ralph," he went on, too much absorbed by his own needs to resent this insinuation, "there's something more; you can help me, you alone."

"Oh yes, I suppose you expect me to go and

plead your cause, to tell her what an excellent, steadfast, faithful young man you are, and to beg her to accept the honour you are doing her."

"It is for her sake. I'm thinking of her alone." Felix did not seem to hear the scathing words thrown at him. "She would not listen to me; she would not let me speak; but she could not hinder the sadness of her eyes. Ralph, I solemnly believe she returns my love!" he cried. "Do you suppose I would have gone to her if I had not had reason to hope?"

"No doubt you find it difficult to believe so fine a gentleman could be rejected."

"It is too hard, too hard, to think that I may lose her for some foolish, tender little scruple on her part. If you will ask her; if she tells you what she told me; if she forbids you to speak for me, then I will understand. I will accept my lot as bravely as I may. She believes in you."

"Oh, so she believes in me!" said Malleson bitterly.

"She will answer anything you ask her. If it is to be no, I will go away and never trouble her again, and make the best I can of what life is left me."

"So I am to be the go-between? I'm to play the benevolent friend, am I! I tell you, I'll do nothing for you—nothing at all," the other

answered with sudden passion. "Haven't you done mischief enough already? I tell you I won't have her disturbed. What right had you to make her grieve, even for a moment?"

"I had the right that every man has to ask the woman he has chosen out of all the world to share his life," said Felix with some manliness. He stood up and pushed the hair from his brow. "I thought you would have understood," he went on, with a boyish yearning for sympathy; "but I dare say I'm very dull company. I'm best alone, so I'll say good night."

He shut the door, and left his cousin to his own reflections.

It has probably been noticed by us all how fleetly and trippingly our theory foots it, while our laggard practice limps behind. Where was now this philosophic and beautiful doctrine of fair play—of allowing to every man his honest due of chances? Some moments of the long hours, which he certainly did not give to sleep, Ralph Malleson may have devoted to a search after this vanished ideal.

Here was a fine complication, indeed, and a pleasant beginning to a little holiday. By way of making things smoother, Felix had taken himself off at early dawn, leaving the burden of explanation to his neighbour. About

the time that Ralph was preparing in no very gentle humour to face the demands of the new day, Philippa stole softly to her friend's room.

"Are you awake, Di?" she called out; but when she turned the handle and peeped in, she saw that Di was kneeling with her face hidden. She did not like the sight; she would better have liked to find her crying, sulking, writing dolefully in her diary, in any mood, in any attitude rather than this. She would have gone away, but at that instant Di rose with a serene face.

"Is your—— Are you better?" Philippa stammered.

"Oh yes, I'm better," said Di. She could return Philippa's troubled glances with the clearest candour. for she had done her no wrong.

"I thought you might like breakfast in bed."

"Oh no; I hate that—half the coffee is spilt, and the crumbs get up your sleeve. Besides, I want to see Ralph."

There were no confidences given or received—the time for these was over; but Philippa was very solicitous about her friend's headache.

"You are sure it is quite gone?" she asked more than once, as they went downstairs arm in arm.

Breakfast was not a comfortable meal;

tempers and feelings had suffered, and even the fare, excellent as it was, failed to soothe them. Mr. Ouvry, whose blandness might have served as oil on troubled waters, had chosen prudently to take his meal alone. If we English were wise, we should taboo the family breakfast, and postpone our assembling until the first burdening hours of the day had been outlived. Some asperity, some ill-humour, some dismal views of life might be spared us if we each consented to banishment, say, till noon.

Mrs. Henshaw was too wedded to insular prejudices to yield to such a suggestion. She presided, in correct morning costume, at the head of the board; but a cloud sat on her handsome face as she dispensed the steaming coffee.

"I really think Mr. Chester is behaving very oddly," she said, her grievance peeping forth. "I trust nothing has happened to him. It is so annoying, when we meant to leave to-night. You did not hear him say where he was going?" She turned to Di. "You were the last to see him, Philippa tells me."

"He did not speak of going anywhere."

"It was very inconsiderate, I must say, not even to leave a message or a note! You were all in the Alhambra together, and you came back without him!"

"Nobody had him in charge," said Philippa, elevating her chin; "he is old enough to go without leading-strings, I suppose."

"But never to return! I can't understand it!" She looked oddly at Di.

"Perhaps he came back without our hearing him. I dreamt of footsteps in the night." Philippa glanced meaningly at Malleson, who did not accept the hint.

The boy might get out of the scrape for himself, he should not help him. All morning he was furtively watching Di. In spite of her cheerful greeting, he kept a jealous outlook for any shadow that might cross her face. It was all nonsense—a piece of boyish vanity on the part of Felix—that her "no" had been reluctantly given. She was only vexed, as any nice girl would be, to disappoint the hopes built on her consent. He told himself this over and over again, yet he kept watching her.

Mrs. Henshaw was proposing a relief party to go in search of the missing youth, when a waiter entered with a note.

She took it, and read it with a darkening brow.

"It's what I call very bad treatment. But then, young men are so impulsive; and we can go to-night all the same," she said, in that irritating way some people have of making a

commentary on any bit of news before presenting you with the text.

"What has he done, mamma?" said Philippa lightly. "Run away with somebody, or joined the Church of Rome, or set out to find the North Pole? Do relieve our minds."

"He says he hopes to join us at Cadiz. We shall certainly not wait for him."

"Then nothing tragic has befallen him after all?" Philippa forebore to glance at Di.

"Oh dear, no; merely a little whim. I shall write and tell him we are all dreadfully angry with him for deserting us."

She read the note aloud. It was a very creditable performance, and not much more illegible than usual.

Felix, with many apologies, announced that he had met a young American, who had persuaded him to do a little bit of mountaineering. He would pick up his luggage on the way back, and hoped to join them at Cadiz in time to take his passage with them; but they must, on no account linger for him, as there was nothing you could so safely count on as delays and hindrances, his friend assured him, etc., etc.

"He doesn't mention the name of his friend."

"Mrs. St. John and all her party went off to Seville yesterday," said Philippa, answering her mother's unspoken thought. Whoever

might be sharing Felix's woes it certainly was not the unfortunate Mr. Meyers.

"We might wait a day longer at Cadiz. It is a pretty place, I believe; and you could retrim my bonnet, Philippa. Blake has such clumsy fingers."

Malleson suggested that the steamer was hardly likely to delay its sailing for the convenience of the most enthusiastic mountaineer, but there were three out of the four persons present who knew very well that, however long the day of grace given him, Felix would not sail with them for England.

Were there ever hours that crept and crawled more tediously than those that divided this morning meal from that late one, taken in haste and in moonlight, before they all started to go downwards for a last time under the sombre arching elms?

Malleson's energy, indeed, was a thing to marvel at. It was hot, but for once he was too restless to lounge as Mr. Ouvry did, now sleeping, now stimulated to gentle excitement by the columns of the *Times*. He took the girls everywhere.

"You know you are just in the way when there is packing to be done," he said; "it is all a mistake if you imagine yourselves of any use." He swept them off impetuously to the little town

lying beneath them. He took them to the Cartuja, among the snuffy monks; to the Zacatin and the bazaars; then he whisked them away to the Alameda, to show themselves off among the southern beauties. He could not bear to let Di out of his sight. Never before had her words and looks been watched and weighed as they were now. How much did this abstracted pause mean, and what interpretation was to be put upon her silence? She was never a person of a great flow of words, and to-day her laughter did not seem less spontaneous. He himself appeared to be in high spirits; there was something grimly amusing, for instance, in the thought of that little commission Felix had given him. He was to reason with her, and to persuade her, was he? She would only smile at him for his pains. Yet all the while he kept watching for a sign, and there was none given him. Di, after a little, became gay in her turn. She entered with spirit into all his proposals, and laughed at all his jokes. Only when it was suggested that they should visit the gipsy quarter, and have their fortunes told, she hung back, and would have nothing to do with this plan.

"So you don't want to know your fate!" said Philippa with a laugh. "The gipsies don't know everything, to be sure!"

Late at night, when they took their places in the diligence for Rio Frio, he boldly announced that he meant to take Di with him in the coupé, and this time there was no question of disagreement. Everybody thought it a very natural arrangement, and Mrs. Henshaw indulged in some mysterious smiles and nods.

"Are you sure you have plenty of wraps, my dear? Do let me lend you my tartan shawl," she said sweetly.

But Di looked down from her high perch, and said that she was quite warm and very comfortable.

Malleson took care that she was well protected from the cold; but he was very silent as they rattled through the streets of sleeping Loja, and then out into the still country under the fading stars. All his forced gaiety had deserted him. It was no part of his plan now to speak the words that would have leapt out so boldly but for Felix's folly. In his heart he cherished deep anger against the boy; but, in spite of his efforts to scorn them and make light of them, to brush them aside from his mind, certain words of his rang in his ears.

"I solemnly believe that she returns my love."

Until he had made quite sure that this was only an impertinent and conceited fancy, born

of desire, how could he make any plea for himself?

Di was very quiet, too, and made as though she slept. She had taken off her hat, and tied a little shawl about her head, and was leaning wearily enough against the leather hood. One might have thought they had quarrelled—so silent were they both; and all the while the mules rushed on, and the mayoral rushed beside them with strange yells and whoops, and much brandishing of a whip. There was no glass, and the great hood hardly kept out the air, growing keener now, for, though the moon still hung pale and wan in the heavens, there were mists and "dim red dreams" of dawn in the east, and stirrings among the shadowy trees as if the night's silence were over.

Malleson stooped to draw a rug closer about his companion, and then something arrested his hand, for even in the imperfect light he could see that Di was crying quietly. There was no mistaking this dumb language; here, surely, he had touched on the skirts of the discovery he had been so keen and yet so fearful to make. It was a bitter moment, perhaps the bitterest of all, and every one of those gentle tears that were "such clear reporters of the heart," was like a stab, for he knew that his hour for renunciation had come.

It was a long time before he made any other movement. By-and-by, prompted by I know not what impulse, he took out his pocket-book, and drew a little paper from it. Di sat up and looked out.

"What are those lights?" she asked.

"Rio Frio; we shall be there immediately."

"Is that where we stop?"

"Yes, the train is waiting for us."

"I'm sorry," she said with a half sigh.

"I have a message for you which I forgot to deliver," he said.

"A message for me?" He could see her colour rise.

"From Mrs. Gordon," he said carelessly. "She entrusted me with this for you." He handed her the paper.

She took it curiously, and bending to the broadening light opened it. In a fine Italian hand, the ink faded and yellow, an address was written.

"Who is Mr. King?" she asked, looking up greatly surprised.

"He is a friend of your mother's, my dear; he knew her long ago, when she was a girl like you. She left this for you." He spoke with great gentleness. His heart was stirred when he thought of the dead woman who had also learnt the hard lesson of renunciation.

"For me—mamma left it for me?"

"She thought that perhaps some day you might want a friend—some one whom you could trust, some one who would love you for her sake. If ever you should want such a friend you will find him in this man. He lives in England, at this address."

"Is this mamma's writing?" she asked, still examining the paper wonderingly.

"Yes."

"I have no letters of hers, not any of her writing at all."

She held the precious fragment carefully. Then another thought seemed to strike her.

"How strange that mamma should have fancied that I might need a friend. I suppose she thought the padre might die too? I dare say he wanted to die when she left him; but then I have you, I should always have you, Ralph."

"Oh yes, you can always have me."

"But I am glad to have this bit of paper, too. Some day I should like to see this Mr. King very much. Does the padre know him? He never spoke of him."

"I don't know," said Malleson hastily.

"Do you think I might write to him?"

"I dare say you might, when you get settled a little."

They had reached Rio Frio, and there was the

bustle of getting into the train, and no more quiet moments. His chance of talk with Di ended with this night journey; for, though they lingered in Seville and again in Cadiz, Mrs. St. John and her escort were in both places, ready to seize on them, and Mrs. Henshaw, with faint protest, let herself be drawn into the whirl of sight-seeing and pleasure. Ralph was busy with affairs of his own, but Herr von Rosen was an irreproachable cavalier, and showed a commendable desire to improve his English accent.

The steamer they had timed themselves to catch sailed without them to British shores; but, though long days went by before the next one claimed them, no Felix appeared.

Perhaps it was this failure on his part to keep his tryst that made Mrs. Henshaw wear so unamiable a face, when at last the ladies had stepped on board and were listening to the final farewells of the gentlemen.

"You'll take care of my little girl, and send her safely back to me?" It was Di's father who was the speaker, and his voice was very soft.

"I wonder, I must say, that you care to send her to England."

Malleson, who was standing near, turned sharply on his heel and heard no more.

Philippa was listening with a heartless smile

to Herr von Rosen's sentimental regrets, while the unhappy Mr. Meyers nursed his woe at a respectful distance.

"Poor wretch!" thought Ralph contemptuously, "is he so blind?" It would be his own turn next for those brave smiles and arch glances. He had said good-bye to Di already. "You will come to London?" she had asked wistfully, and he had promised that if she needed him he would go; that at least was left to him, to be her friend in need. But he had still his adieus to make to one person, and his word to say—a word of warning, should it be?

"Di will not be quite without friends in England," he said, looking into Mrs. Henshaw's disturbed face.

"I will hand her over to her cousin when we get to London. You may trust me to take care of her," she assured him. "I know how anxious you must feel—so natural in the circumstances; but I will look upon her as my child—I will be a mother to her."

Malleson checked her with a little movement of his hand.

"I was not speaking of her cousin," he said. "I have given her the address of an old and dear friend of her mother's—Mr. Alec King."

It was cruel, perhaps, and unmanly to read so coldly the quick changes in her expression, but

he had Di to think of. He knew very well, he could read it in the sudden anger of her eyes, that the lady would never forgive him his knowledge of that name; but what of that? It was for Di; it was all he could do for her, he told himself vehemently, as he stood on the quay at her father's side, while she went sailing away in the blue distance; it was all he could do for her, though night and day he remembered how he had surprised her silent tears.

CHAPTER V.

"For stony limits cannot hold out love."

"AND how do you like it?"

They were talking of England, and it was Miss Bell Fullarton who put this question to Di. It said something for her freedom from prejudice that she had waited a whole fortnight before asking it.

"I think it is splendid," said Di rashly, unaware that her praise was not welcome. "It is much grander than I expected; and it is all so different from home."

"Ah, yes, very likely. Of course you must be glad of a change, but wait till you have seen Scotland. If you think so much of England, you won't have words enough for the north. We'll go there in a few weeks now."

"It's very far away, isn't it?" said Di doubtfully. In spite of her enjoyment she felt like a tethered bird: the further her wanderings, the more certain she was to feel the jerk of the string that pulled her homewards. She

had not forgotten that night on which she had first heard of Bell's fair island on the far north seas; but where was the glamour, where the enchantment now?

"Far enough for you to forget all this," said Bell, energetically. "England is very well in its way; it has some few advantages, perhaps. I don't object to it for a little. It is very well to contrast your own country with another sometimes."

"That is what I say," murmured madame. "To hear how one's country is spoken of abroad, that is a thing to make you not quite so proud of your superior virtue."

"The French can have no ill words for Scotland," said this fierce patriot, looking sternly at her friend. "They appreciate us, they respect us, they are proud to claim us as allies."

"Ah," said madame lightly, "we will take the history another time, my dear." She knew very well what was coming, and she was not unwilling to spare Di an occasional harangue.

What Bell might have answered remains unknown, for at that moment the door was opened, and Philippa was announced.

Di sprang forward with a little exclamation. She could hardly have explained why she was so glad to see Philippa, but in a minute her arms were round the other's neck.

"Oh, how good of you to come! Bell is always ready for visitors," she said, silencing Philippa's graceful apologies for the earliness of the hour. She was placed in a big chair, relieved of her sealskin, and introduced to the other ladies all in a breath.

"Now begin and tell me everything," said Di, seating herself on the fender-stool. The early summer was cold, and there was a little glow of burning coal.

"What a big commission!" said Philippa, laughing. "There is nothing to tell. Things don't happen here so fast as in Madrid. Mamma and I have been pulling about the furniture, and making ourselves acquainted with the amount of damage our possessions have sustained. It's not lively work, counting cracked tea-cups. I don't think we have done much else, except grumble and wish ourselves anywhere else."

"Perhaps you don't like living in London?"

"I should put it much less mildly than that." She turned her blue eyes frankly on Bell. "I'm not at all a lover of my country; I like other people's countries much better."

"Poor Bell! you are the only patriot," said Di, with a smile.

"Ah, have I made a mistake?" said Philippa gently.

"Yes," said Di mischievously; "more than a mistake. You ought to think the sound of Bow Bells the most beautiful music in the world. It ought to stir up something in your heart, and make you thankful you were born a British child."

"But I have been born ever so often since my baby days. The mere accident of having begun life on English soil ought not to count."

"Ah, that is so true," murmured madame, recognizing here a kindred spirit.

"Bits of me came to life in France, and bits in Italy or Germany."

"And in Spain?" Di questioned, with a sudden anxiety.

"Well, perhaps just some trifling morsels," said Philippa, with a smile. "So you see"—she turned to Bell—"England treated me like a step-child, and turned me over to foreign nurses; and I don't love her any more than one loves a step-mamma in general."

"I don't expect every one to agree with me," said Bell stiffly.

She thought all this very frivolous, if it was not downrightly wicked. If living out of your country made you talk like this, it was well to stay at home.

"You will stay to lunch?" She gave the

invitation very politely; and Philippa accepted it readily.

"I am glad to escape our broken china for a little," she said. "If my home were like this, I should learn to love London too."

Bell had a fixed theory about hospitality: it was a national virtue, and therefore to be practised even towards an enemy. She made up her mind very quickly that Philippa was "not nice"—in the full sense of that comprehensive feminine phrase—nevertheless she went forth to order extra chops and a more seductive pudding. While she was absent superintending the preparations, the others drew a little closer round the fire with a sensible air of relief. Your very virtuous person is apt to be an uncomfortable companion. A smack of Bohemia stole into the talk. In ten minutes Philippa had heard all about M. Adolphe, and had gladdened madame's heart by her praise of Paris.

"And now for your news," she said at last, turning to Di.

"I have none, except a letter from Miss Piper."

"Is the great feud made up?"

Di shook her head.

"You don't know Miss Barbara."

"I think I know as much as I want to know. Shall I write to her, Di?"

"It would have been better to speak," said Di, remembering a promise that had remained unfulfilled. "Letters never explain what you mean."

"Then I'll go back on purpose. It will be a good excuse to return to that happy land."

"I hear from Ralph too, of course. You don't care to see the *Imparcial*, I suppose?"

"Well, no, I think not," said Philippa, with twinkling eyes; "unless it contains any very harrowing particulars, and then you would have to translate them. There's nothing about two rash young men lost in the snow, is there?"

"Why should you think of such dismal things?" said madame; then she noticed Di's face. "Even in England it has ceased to snow," she said.

"Oh, but you will always find snow on the Sierra Nevada. I have it on the authority of the guide-books. Di, don't look at me like that. I was only going to remark, that you needn't believe any sensational paragraphs you may see in the *Imparcial*."

"I was not likely to believe that."

"Nor I; because I saw one of the mountaineers yesterday."

That was all Philippa chose to impart, and Di would ask no questions. Philippa was not

in a pleasant humour. She was inclined to be satirical, and had the audacity to make gentle fun of Bell. "England and the damaged furniture had spoiled her temper," she said, as she went away.

Di hardly noticed the unevenness of her mood; she remembered little else but her sparing words about Felix. It is needless to say that she had thought a great deal about the young man to whom she had refused a hearing that balmy night in the deserted Mirador. A woman's "no" is always a very important affair to her. So much hangs on the skirts of that little word. Suppose one were to say it, and then that one were immediately assailed by unavailing regrets? That was only a hypothetical case, of course—a mere idle speculation—without bearing on the question. "Yes," is just as easily pronounced; but what big issues it, too, carries with it! Di gave this matter its due share of pondering at night, when Bell had marched off with the candles. She never felt in the least inclined to spend her wakeful hours in reading any of the novels that had seemed such a snare to Miss Townsend. There are times when one is a hero or a heroine to oneself; when one's own woes, one's own misses in life are more absorbing than the most tragic fiction.

She had said that she found England delightful, and it was partly true. She liked to be in a whirl of sight-seeing; out and about all day long, till the roar and confusion of the endless streets deadened her senses and made her tired enough to sleep at night. She was in a feverish haste—though she never said it to herself—to gather and build up new impressions that were to shut out older ones. And now any chance meeting at a street corner might blow all this careful fabric down at a breath.

"What is this little mystery about a young man?" madame asked later, when they were for a moment alone.

She loved little mysteries about young men. They were seated by the fire; Di had a book, but it lay unread on her lap. Madame sat with her back to the light; she was doing nothing—she could do nothing very gracefully. She lifted a fire-screen and turned it about in her slim white hands. "It made me curious," she said. "Your friend has a way of saying things that makes one listen; that is a gift."

"You mean what Philippa was saying this morning? It was about a friend of ours, Mr. Felix Chester."

"Yes," said madame encouragingly, making a note of the name.

"We saw a great deal of him in Madrid.

We all went to Granada together." Di was bent on being very circumstantial. "He left us there very suddenly, to go on a little excursion to the mountains. He had a friend with him, you know; and he promised to be back in time to sail with us, but he wasn't, though we waited more than a week."

"Ah," said madame, "young men do that. It's a little way they have to prove that they are free. But you never want to assert your freedom till you have begun to lose it," she nodded her head sagaciously. "You have only to wait, and he will come back."

"He has come back. You heard Philippa say so."

"There were two mountaineers, were there not?" madame asked carelessly.

"Philippa meant Mr. Chester; we did not know the other."

Madame looked with a curious smile at the grave face, on which the firelight played.

"Is he handsome, this wayward Mr. Chester?"

"I never thought about it. I think he has a good face."

"And rich? But your Englishmen who travel are always rich."

"I suppose so," said Di, wishing madame would not ask so many questions.

"Your friend is very pretty," said the older lady softly.

"Oh yes, very pretty—very pretty indeed. I never saw any one so beautiful as Philippa, and she is nice, too," said poor Di, eager to be just. "Some day before long he will marry her, I think."

To speak the words out plainly like this, made them seem very convincing. She had an odd sensation that she was listening to some one else's summing up.

"There is something so romantic about a youthful attachment," said madame, discreetly addressing herself to the hand-screen. "But your cousin Bell—I have little hope of her." She sighed as she thought of M. Adolphe, who had not been invited to London. "She is too wise; it is not good to be so very wise."

Then Bell herself came in, and sentiment flew out of the window, which she flung open.

"You dreadful people, you are sitting in an oven," she said. "And don't you know how bad that is for your health? Di, if you are not too tired, I think we might begin our French lessons. Madame is doing nothing, and we have had such an idle day."

Di jumped up, and her book fell on the rug. Bell picked it up.

"Scott," she said approvingly, "perhaps you would rather read?"

"Then I could continue to be idle," murmured Madame Lavoisier, who loved her after-dinner ease.

"Oh no; let it be French by all means," said Di, departing to fetch the dictionary. She had a fierce longing to grapple with defaulting tenses, to insist on grasping the meaning of the most idiomatic phrases, to do something very difficult and absorbing—in short, to rebuild the wall that threatened to tumble down and lay bare the past. And all the time the invader who was to destroy these frail defences, was at the gates.

CHAPTER VI.

"And then the lover, sighing like a furnace."

About a week after the *Sevilla* had sailed for London, Felix Chester suddenly turned up in Madrid. Malleson found him buried in the depths of his own easy chair when he returned from his club, where he had dined. He would not pretend to any cordiality, when he discovered this lounging figure in possession. He was not glad; his greeting was ungracious.

"So you have come back to your right mind," he said.

"I've come back to Madrid."

"Well, I wish you wouldn't be quite so melodramatic in your manner of disappearing and turning up again. You think it amusing, I dare say, to play jack-in-the-box in this fashion; but I'm past the age for appreciating surprises."

"It's immensely entertaining. I suppose you would like to hear what a jolly, pleasant time I've had of it down there, since I left you?"

Felix leaned back in the chair, which he had not surrendered to its owner. He spoke indifferently; he no longer raged and raved; he was not even gloomy.

Malleson looked at him with a suspicious eye; he misliked this sluggish behaviour. According to all rule and precedent, Felix should have begun to discover that life had still some salt and savour. A week's solitude had worked miracles before now.

"So long as you have got over that piece of folly——" he began.

"Oh yes, I've got over it, of course. A fortnight is such a long time; isn't it?"

"About the usual time, I think," said Malleson, with great grimness.

This was too much. Felix started up and began to pace the room.

"Confound you!" he said. "It's an impertinence to hear you talk like that. As if a lifetime would be too much to serve for her! But what can you know about it?" he said, with much scorn. "You, who never had a thought beyond your precious politics. A fine mistress that, truly. And yet you talk of forgetting her, and getting over one's love for her as if it were a thing to be ashamed of. Much you know about it!"

"And pray, what do you propose to do next,

if one may ask?" said Malleson civilly, paying no heed to this outburst.

"I'll tell you." Felix seated himself astride of a chair and leaned his arms on the back. "I came to tell you I'm going to England to-night."

"Oh, indeed—to-night."

"I'm going by the north line. I'll take my chance of getting through the lines or being knocked on the head; and when I get to London I'll go to her and ask her if it was all true what she said to me that night down there. Sometimes I think I must have dreamt it——" he broke off, staring in front of him. "If it is true —well, I'll come back and volunteer for Don Carlos, and give some fellow a chance of putting an ounce of lead into me," he said, with rather a ghastly laugh. "There—you know my plans."

"Thank you very much," said Malleson, with great politeness. "Yes, I know your plans. You don't care to hear my opinion of them, I suppose?"

"Not particularly," Felix answered with great frankness. "I've made up my mind."

"Then you don't care to hear that it's generally considered a cowardly and a low thing to persecute a woman who has shown you, as plainly as possible, that your attentions are unwelcome."

"Persecute her!" Felix smiled. "Much you understand about it. It is some one else that's persecuting her, if it comes to that. I haven't got to the bottom of it yet, but there's some reason—some foolish enough reason, I dare say, but sacred to her, God bless her! that kept her from listening to me. And do you think I'm going to let a cobweb like that stand in the way of her happiness and mine, while there's a chance left of brushing it away?"

"It's a very ingenious theory, no doubt, and a fine way of saving your pride. Why can't you take her refusal like a man. Are you the first to be rejected, do you suppose? Is love the only thing in life? Are you love-sick boys to rule the world?"

"It's the only thing for me, at present."

"Go home and study mathematics," cried the much-enduring Ralph, grimly; "that's a nice, absorbing, steadying occupation for you."

Felix stared at him with a kind of sublime pity. What a poor, maimed, broken-winged sort of life a man must lead, who could calmly suggest the study of the differential calculus as a cure for the wounds of the heart!

"What a lot you have missed!" he said, in a sort of burst of compassion, looking at his cousin as if he were some new and curious variety of animal. "I'd rather be in my shoes than yours,

even though it is to be no. I'll tell you what," he went on, not waiting for any rejoinder; "if she'll have me, I'll make something of life yet. I'll begin to do something, and astonish you all. I have it in me. I never went in for the high moral line, but I have my ideas of what a man may do to make the most of his opportunities."

Malleson hardly listened to the impetuous confidences that followed. If they reached him at all, it was but as a dim echo of his own old hopes and aspirations, when he too had possessed the sublime egotism of youth. Felix brightened under the visions he was calling up; he had always been rarely frank, and not even the entire absence of sympathy could arrest the flow.

Malleson, who had seated himself again, leaned his head on his hand. He was picturing—he had thought of it to weariness—the hour when he had surprised Di checking back her sobs, hiding away the traces of her tears, lest he should read them in the breaking dawn; and all this babble in praise of work, this sudden scorn of idleness passed through his brain like the jargon of an unknown tongue.

It was hard enough, surely, that he should have to entertain this lover—now ardent and hopeful, now despairing—through the mortal hours that refused to hasten their steps and to

bring the moment of departure any nearer. Felix took it for granted, in the most exasperating way, that he was to be made welcome to house-room for himself and his plaints, and to a meal besides. For hunger, which is a very healthy symptom, began now to assert itself.

"I brought my traps round here," he explained. "It's as easy to start from here as from the 'Paris.' Suppose you ring and despatch old Anchel to the café for some supper?"

"Send for yourself; I want nothing."

"Oh, you'll have acquired an appetite by the time his old legs have trotted back," said Felix, jumping up and beginning to clear the table of its burden of books and papers. "You only want to make a beginning. As for me, I forgot to eat, I believe. I was in an awfully queer state till I had made up my mind."

The boy had always taken liberties with the older man, who had rather liked it; but it was odd that he could not see how unwelcome he was for once. Malleson grew dumb at last under the infliction, and took refuge in his pipe. Felix behaved as very young men—and some older ones—are wont to behave at certain crises of their lives. He stared for long spaces without movement into the fire; then he would burst out with hopes and doubts, plans and despondencies, all in a breath. During intervals of

melancholy and self-pity, he would consult the stars and heave profound sighs, and then again he was back at his friend's elbow, making preposterous demands on his sympathy.

Perhaps Malleson hardly believed in those vows and honest resolutions, in those assurances that the days of cakes and ale were over; more likely he never listened to them. He ate and drank but little, while Felix tossed off glass after glass of the light, thin vintage, his hopes rising every moment. Malleson had his own thoughts to face, his own warring impulses to wrestle with. While the boy talked of love with something of a new reverence and awe in his heart, the older man was busy with the same passion, only with him it was not the love that claims, but the love that renounces.

But it was not till the last moment of all that he spoke, and then with some of an Englishman's gruffness and hatred of a scene.

Felix had a carriage to himself. There were very few passengers, and they were all armed and huddled for the most part together, talking heroically and with a fine flavour of disdain of the perils in front of them, yet casting dismal backward looks that belied them. No one cared to run the blockade who could stay peacefully at home; and the Englishman who ventured unarmed was looked on as a Bedlamite. But what

are obstacles to lovers? and what are any dangers compared to that great and possible calamity of a refusal?

Felix took possession of his solitary compartment with the air of a conqueror. He refused to fortify himself with newspapers or sandwiches, a flask, or any other consolations of a traveller; he had his hopes and his fears, and these were food enough for mind and body. Up to this time nothing had been said beyond the merest commonplaces. It seemed as if Telemachus were to depart on his mission without the blessing of his old mentor. But at the last moment, when the word of warning had been given, and the little crowd was sending its shrill good wishes after the adventurers about to face unknown perils, Malleson put out his hand.

"Tell Di, from me," he said slowly, "to think of nothing—nothing at all—but the prompting of her own heart. Do you hear? Say it from me, as my wish."

Felix wrung the hand hard in both his own.

"I knew you would help me," he said, taking this last kind stroke of fortune as if it were his due. "She believes in you. She will listen if you bid her!"

Then the train sped on its northern way, and the last thing that Malleson saw was a face stretched forth from it, all irradiated with smiles;

and the last thing he heard was a strong young voice calling out audaciously, "I'll let you know of my success." The traveller took hope now as his comrade and bid defiance to his fears, for he could think of no scruple on Di's part that would fail to vanish before the wish of her old friend Ralph.

So one went on in sunshine, and the other in the shade. It was a hard thing to have done; and Malleson, as he walked home, was conscious of a certain supercilious wonder at his own act. He had so long ceased to expect anything heroic of himself, and if this was not quixotic, what, then, could be called by that name? But it was not for Felix he had done it. No, in spite of the grudging love he bore to the lad, it was not for Felix.

"He went home and threw himself in his chair. The remnants of the meal were still on the table; but the frank, persistent voice was silenced at last, and there was nothing to disturb his thinking.

But presently he gave that up too. His pen lay where he had left it, the ink hardly dry on it, and as his glance fell on it his fingers closed about it eagerly. Here was consolation at hand. He drew his books and his papers towards him, "impatient of life, patient only of work"—that faithful friend that never failed him.

CHAPTER VII.

"Oh, le bons temps! J'etais bien malheureux!"

"Mir war's so wohl, so weh."

Di had quickly formed a great friendship for Lady Malleson, and spent much time in the worship of the babies who had usurped Ralph's place.

The widow was a foolish and impulsive little woman, with caressing ways that were like balm after the robust and bracing sharpness of Bell's neighbourhood. Besides the babies, who came in for lavish attention, they had one subject in common, of which neither ever wearied. It was Ralph this and Ralph that, while the ladies sat contriving picturesque garments for the twins or sipping their afternoon tea; and the mother would point out with pride that the bigger and bolder of the boys who was named after his uncle. This young gentleman was solemnly addressed a hundred times a day, and told that he must faithfully observe the ways of his name-

sake and grow up like him. Di let him take endless liberties with her hair and dress, and play the most uncomfortable gymnastics on her knee. The larger dole of ribbons and sweets, though she pretended to be severely just, went to the youngster, who had a look of the other Ralph about his baby brow.

"He was so good to me," Lady Malleson would say in her soft contralto; "and he might have been angry, you know, because it was hard on him, wasn't it?"

"Oh, I don't think he cared," said Di, tossing the smaller Ralph. "He isn't a man to covet money or titles; and for my part I think he is best as he is."

"There wasn't much money, though my boys will be better off than their father was; but he ought to have been the head of the house."

"He could never have looked for that. He must have known that his brother would marry."

"I don't think so," said the widow quickly. "Our marriage was kept a secret. I did not even know that my husband had a brother till almost the last. He never spoke of him."

"Ralph was not a brother to be ashamed of."

Di did not wish to penetrate the secrets of her friend's married life, but she was not slow to see that this was a thing to be disapproved.

"No. And you see, what with the unwelcome

surprise of a marriage, and one thing and another, I could not expect him to take kindly to me and the boys. I use to cry about it on the voyage home. I thought he would hate the boys."—she looked at the curly heads plaintively —"but you can't think how fond he was of them though they were little mites when he saw them, and gentlemen as a rule don't take to babies. He did everything for us, and settled us here."

"That was last year?"

"Yes, just after I came home. Did he tell you about us?"

"No, not then."

Di reflected that, long and well as she had known Ralph, she had heard singularly little about his family.

"He is very good to us," Lady Malleson said again. "He is always sending presents to the boys. I must show you his last gift. They use the spoons every day, don't you, my beauties?"

"Oh; I know about those. I helped to choose them." Di smiled as she remembered that far-distant day, and then she sighed.

"Of course I will consult him about their education. They must go to Eton, if we can afford it; and to Oxford, as their father and uncle did before them. Di, couldn't you persuade Ralph to come and live here? It would be such

a comfort to have him always at hand. I can't explain things in letters, you know."

"Oh no," said Di quickly. "I am sure he wouldn't come; and besides I couldn't spare him," she added, smilingly.

"But you have so many friends."

"Very few, and nobody like Ralph. Do you know a strange thing has happened? There were two people he wished me to see, here in England. You were the first."

"So he told you about us in the end?"

"Oh yes. He said I must come often. The other was a friend of my mother's—some one she knew when she was a girl. I got his address, and I was to write to him if—— I wanted very much to see him, since he had known mamma; but yesterday I saw a notice of his death in the *Times*."

"How sad! Are you quite sure it was the same?"

"Quite sure. It was the correct address, and everything. He lived in the east of England. I wanted to go even then. I thought they would let me look at him, perhaps, if I told them about his having known mamma; but Bell said it would be foolish, and could do no good. Ah, I wish I had written at once when I came!"

"It would not have been nice for you. Your ... was quite right." Lady Malleson, who

was timid, shuddered over the strange fancy. "You found my boys and me alive and well, at any rate; and you can tell Uncle Ralph all about us when you go back to him."

Nothing more was said then, but when the babies had been sent to the nursery, Lady Malleson began once more—

"I wish Ralph would live here. I would try to be very good to him."

"You wouldn't like his untidy ways and his pipes."

"Yes, I should. I would bear anything in that way; he deserves the best I can give him. Di, I must tell you, he did something very noble once. My husband was in trouble, and he got him out of it; he took it on himself. That was before I knew Roderick. I can't explain things, and I only know this from some letters of my husband's I have seen since he died. I was looking in his desk for some papers that were wanted, and I found these. I burnt them. No one else had any right to know about it; and it troubled me to think that I had found out a secret Roderick had not shared with me. Do you think he would have been very angry?"

"It was mean of him not to tell you."

"Di, you forget, he was my husband and the father of my children, and I loved him."

"Yes, yes," said Di quickly. "I know it

doesn't seem the same to you; don't tell me any more." She wondered at her friend's impulse to confession. "I should have kept my husband's sins to myself," she thought, but she said nothing of this aloud.

"I told you because I thought you liked Ralph," said the little widow, sobbing now, "and I know he likes you."

"Oh, I know he does," said Di, smiling at the idea that she needed to be assured of Ralph's friendship.

"He told me so, he was always talking about you, and I thought if you could comfort him—— I and my boys have done him so much harm!"

"He couldn't be a dearer friend to me than he is," said Di, stooping to kiss the quivering lips; "and I always knew he was the best of men. As to harm, he would laugh at you if you talked to him like that. He is as proud as you are of the boys; and I am glad they have such a good uncle."

She did not add she was sorry they had so bad a father. She thought very poorly of the late baronet, and glorified Ralph in her heart as a saint and martyr. "I did not need her to tell me how good he was, or to urge me to care for him," she said to herself as she went home, her head erect, her eyes shining, and her lips smiling at that brave story of her friend.

It was but a step from one house to the other, and she still wore this look when she opened the drawing-room door, and found herself in a moment face to face with Felix Chester. She paused for hardly a perceptible instant, and then she went forward quietly.

"How do you do?" she said, holding out her hand.

"Quite well—oh, very well," he answered rather incoherently; and then he added something about passing through London, and wishing to know how she had stood the journey.

"It was very nice, except in the Bay of Biscay; it wasn't exactly smooth there."

"Not what you expected the sea to be?"

"Not like our plain," she answered smiling. He wished she had not been quite so ready with her words and her smiles.

"Mr. Chester has had a much worse journey than you," said Bell, looking up from her knitting. "He has been telling us about his adventures."

"Oh, it was nothing," he said lightly. "A mere bit of bravado on the part of the insurgents—a lesson in waiting—that was all." (It had by no means seemed such a mere trifle at the time to this impatient wooer). "Your Spaniard is an entertaining creature when he is dressed in a little brief authority."

"Ah," said madame, with a little shiver, "you are well out of that barbarous land, both of you."

"We were safe enough under our national colours. Do you remember Miss Barbara's Union Jack?" he turned to Di. Then he explained to the other ladies how Mrs. Gordon had manufactured a wonderful banner, which was displayed from a window on every fresh rumour of a Carlist approach. "We were all at the making of it; the chief difficulty was to get the white band of the St. Andrew's Cross to show up properly. There would have been no virtue in the flag unless Scotland had been well represented."

"Miss Barbara is very loyal, she would please you, Bell. Did you see any of them—did you see papa?" Di asked, turning to Felix.

"No." He was ready to scourge himself for the omission. "I was only a few hours in Madrid, and I spent them with Ralph." He remembered all at once that he ought to have had a solemn interview with Mr. Ouvry. That was the thing aspirants were always supposed to do. Why had he so recklessly wasted his opportunities; why had he not cultivated that bland gentleman's society with more assiduity? He was tempted to go on the spot and procure a return ticket for Madrid.

"Ralph was well? Good old Ralph!" said Di, and a smile curled her lips again as she remembered what a hero he was.

"Yes; and hard at work, of course, as usual."

"Who is this Ralph?" said Bell, with a touch of asperity. She misliked the warmth of tone in which he was mentioned.

"Why, I have told you about him often? He is my dearest friend and brother," said Di, with shining eyes.

"And mine," cried Felix hotly. "He is the best old fellow in the world." He forgot Ralph's lukewarm reception of his tidings. He would have forgiven his cousin any coldness, since he served as such a delightful tie and common bond of union with Di.

"And he is half Scotch," said Di demurely, as if this were his crowning virtue.

"And yet he is content to live in Spain? It seems to me you are all very bad patriots over there."

"You find Scotch people everywhere," said Felix, as if he were announcing an important discovery. "There are a good lot of them in London, and they manage to rub along somehow."

"That is our revenge for Flodden," said Miss Bell promptly; and this brilliant reply deserves to be recorded as the nearest approach

to a joke ever made by this matter-of-fact young woman.

Madame smiled inwardly at the graciousness of Bell's bearing towards her guest. She shut her eyes and tried to think that it was M. Adolphe, who sat with such an air of being at home in the easy chair, and in whose honour Bell had laid aside her knitting. Alas! the elegant and chivalrous M. Adolphe would never have dared to take the liberties this young man was taking, who actually smiled at things Scotch and remained unrebuked. Bell and he, indeed, got on excellently. They were both entirely honest; and there was something direct and simple about Bell that so far counterbalanced her inability to appreciate a pleasantry, though I am aware that in this age of ours it is counted almost criminal to be without a sense of humour.

"Stay and have some tea, unless you despise tea in the afternoon?" she said, when he showed signs of taking his leave.

"I think it is a delightful institution," he said fervently; and, indeed, it was a fashion that pleased him much at the moment, since it gave him an excuse to linger.

"Ralph sent you a message; it was rather a long one. May I come another day and deliver it?" he asked boldly, as he carried off Di's cap.

It was Bell who was the first to reply. He somehow got permission without difficulty, even graciously, to come again. "We shall be very happy to see you when you have nothing better to do," she said, in her formal little way that always amused madame.

It surprised Di, when she had time to think of it, and she thought a good deal of it in the solitude of her pretty room—how easily the meeting had been got over, and how well Felix had succeeded in making a good impression on the mistress of the house;—no such simple matter for an Englishman, if you please.

"That's an intelligent young man," said madame softly. "He has been everywhere—at Kylmure, too."

"Yes," said Bell. "He knows the Hendersons, Di" (and here the secret peeped out). "I can't think how I never happened to see him there. He says he will very likely visit them this summer. He may be going about the same time we go."

"Then he will escort us," said madame graciously.

But Di had not to wait on tardy August days for further meetings. It was wonderful what a large licence the young man took to himself from Miss Bell's stiff permission, and how often he turned up in the little house at

Kensington. His excuses were Machiavellian in their ingenuity. You would have thought that he was a raw countryman of Miss Fullarton's, so eager was his thirst for sight-seeing; and as for art, it seemed as if he were left to be its sole champion.

Bell fell in quite pleasantly with all his proposals.

"Miss Ouvry hasn't seen the Dudley or the Society of British Artists," he would say quite gravely. "Don't you think we ought to go there this afternoon? It's as well to let her see these things now, for after Scotland, you know, she won't care for stuffy galleries," said this diplomatic youth.

"Certainly," she would reply with equal gravity, "by all means let us go. I wish to be quite impartial. I wish her to see everything."

She gave Ned Henderson some credit for good taste in the choice of a friend. Here was an Englishman who could in his poor way appreciate the superiority of north over south. And as for Di all this time—every one who has ever read a novel must know by heart what she felt and thought—how bitter-sweet were her reflections, how brave and how unending her battles with herself. Philippa's name was not mentioned by either of them, yet she could not but wonder where he spent the hours that were not

passed at Kensington. Did Philippa sing to him in the dull Brompton drawing-room, and did they laugh together as they used to laugh—the merry peals coming up to her as she stood alone on her high balcony above the surging crowd? She tried to remember claims older than hers—promises meant faithfully; she honestly strove to hope that Felix found the respectable Brompton mansion a sort of earthly paradise; but it was a poor, half-nourished hope at the best, and its term of life was nearly over.

On one occasion, when they had all been looking at some pictures in Bond Street, Felix persuaded the ladies to rest for half an hour in his rooms. He had some large photographs of Scotch scenery, about the mounting of which he was anxious to consult Miss Fullarton. The place was close at hand, he said, overruling all objections, and leading the way boldly. He had hinted modestly at the discomfort of a bachelor's home, but in truth the quarters were very luxurious. The large sitting-room overlooked a busy fashionable street, but it was full of subdued light, and the air was heavy with the breath of flowers, such as are not often found in a bachelor's den.

Here, too, Lady Malleson was discovered seated. She had taken off her bonnet, and looked very much at home, so perhaps this lavish and

reckless display of hothouse treasures was for her pleasure.

"I am so glad you have come," she said, seizing Di; "I thought you would never have had enough of art."

"Art has taken it out of us, at any rate. Now, you will stay and eat something before we look at the photographs? There's nothing like a picture gallery for giving one an appetite."

He went away with pretence of ordering an impromptu meal; as if they did not all know quite well that the feast was spread and waiting them in the next room.

"Come and take off your bonnets," said Lady Malleson, rising, and leading the way. "Di, you look quite pale with the heat." She lifted a flask of eau-de-Cologne, and sprinkling her fingers, touched the girl's pale cheeks softly.

"It is hot. Did you know we were coming?"

"Why, yes!" cried the little widow. "He wrote to me two days ago."

"That explains his gold-topped scent-bottles," said Bell gravely. "When will men learn that women are not all frivolous? I thought he was sensible."

"Perfume is very nice on a hot day. Don't you think so?" Lady Malleson opened her eyes very wide. She did not understand Bell's look, which said as plainly as possible, "She is

English, poor thing. English people are all so luxurious. She doesn't know any better."

"He's a charming young man," said madame, with enthusiasm; "he's quite Parisian." She put up her eyeglass and looked all round the sitting-room, to which they had returned.

"Why doesn't he hang up his soup-tureen?" Bell asked, glancing with disapproval at the bits of china suspended on the walls. "I suppose you will go into raptures over that terra-cotta vase; but it looks to me like nothing else so much as the section of a drain-pipe."

Felix came back presently and marshalled them into the dining-room. He neglected Lady Malleson, and devoted his whole attention to Bell. Madame Lavoisier was occupied in approving of the many little dishes, dainty and delicate. "None of your big English roasts, all raw and red," she remarked afterwards. It was a banquet arranged after a fashion that would not have disgraced a Frenchman. Di and her friend were deep in discourse about the babies; the mother describing with pardonable pride their latest accomplishments, so that Bell had a clear field, and was able to give this Englishman much valuable advice.

Afterwards he showed them his little collection with hospitable grace. It was a curious medley, and might have passed for a record of many

fleeting fancies, hotly pursued and soon abandoned. There were relics of boating, racing, and hunting days, and one trophy from a far-north deer forest that won Miss Fullarton's regard, and restored the young man to the old place in her esteem; black-letter books and pottery of eccentric device, not to speak of pipes and whips, and weapons of slaughter enough to furnish forth an armoury.

"And do you carry all this about with you?" Bell asked.

"Oh no. I only come here from time to time. I knock about the world a good deal, you see, and this is all I can boast of in the way of a home."

"One can see that you have seen the world," said madame graciously; "this apartment is bewitching."

"It is dull enough often, I assure you."

He spoke so earnestly that Lady Malleson's gentle heart was touched for him. Would he like a visit now and then from the twins? she wondered. She was considering whether she could make this sacrifice to his cheerfulness, when he again addressed Bell.

"I want your opinion of the piano, Miss Fullarton, if you will kindly give it. It's a new one, and I'm not sure of the tone. Won't you please try it for me?"

He led her across the room, and Bell seated herself and struck some chords critically. She gave her verdict conscientiously, and then instinctively her fingers wandered into a plaintive minor air, and she began to sing absently:

"Oh, why left I my hame?
Why did I cross the deep?
Oh, why left I my hame where my forefathers sleep?
I sigh for Scotia's shore,
And I gaze across the sea,
But I cannot get a blink o' my ain countree."

Felix lingered dutifully till the first lines were sung, and then he left her side and went to Di, who stood at the moment alone, a little apart from the other ladies who had withdrawn to one of the windows.

She had been very quiet; she alone asked no questions. She was living in those days in a sort of dream from which she knew that sooner or later she must awake. There had been no pain, hardly any awkwardness in this renewed friendship. Why should they not be friends, best and faithfullest of friends? Felix had been very gentle with her and had forgiven her any disappointment she might have caused him. He had got over it beautifully. She professed herself glad that he had forgiven and forgotten, and did her best to stifle the impertinent doubts that would assert themselves,

and to believe this preposterous fiction rather than give her fluttering hopes their due.

Felix had hardly spoken to her all day. It was very rude of him to talk when Miss Bell was entertaining the company; but the matrons who stood by the window had set a bad example, and the singer would never reproach them; she was, indeed, far away from them all in her "ain countree."

"You know that song?" he asked, coming close to her, and speaking low not to disturb the music.

"No," she said. "Is it Scotch?"

"Yes, it always makes me feel wretched—an outcast, a tramp—a wandering Dutchman, if you like."

"Why?" she questioned, opening her eyes; "it is pretty."

"It's a positive insult to sing it in my hearing; what have I to do with songs about home? I might long for a lifetime, but where is my home, here or across the sea?"

"You have a very pretty one here," said Di, not uninclined to smile at this tirade.

"This!" It is impossible to convey the disdain of the tone. "Do you call this a home? I've a roof to cover me, no doubt; but then, any fellow with twopence in his pocket can command that—as for anything else——"

He poured contempt on his surroundings. Nothing could be more pitiable than his circumstances. Where was any lot so hard as his? "I see other men positively gloating on their happiness. They talk to you of an English fireside — what do I know of an English fireside? I live on the outskirts of life; I look at happiness through other men's eyes. There's nobody in London more lonely than I am."

"You could go somewhere else," she suggested, this time laughing outright. "If the sight of your friends in London makes you so unhappy, why don't you go somewhere else?"

Felix, with a sudden change from tragic woe to the utmost eagerness, answered promptly.

"I've been thinking of that. You don't care very much for London, do you?"

"Not very much," said Di, failing to see what this had to do with the question.

"A man ought to settle and have a bit of earth to call his own. It seems to me the best sort of career, the best way to acquire an interest in your country and your countrymen. That sort of thing is impossible here. A bachelor in London is the most selfish being in existence. You believe in all that, don't you? I wanted to consult you about it." Was there ever a youth so eager for miscellaneous advice?

"I think it would be good for you to have some work to do."

"You think I have been shamefully idle?"

"Not shamefully," she smiled, "but just a little, perhaps."

"Property nowadays brings plenty of responsibilities, if one cares to take them on one's shoulders."

"You would like to buy land in England?"

"A man I know told me yesterday of a place that is for sale in Essex. Just the sort of thing I've been looking out for, for a year or two—by fits and starts," he acknowledged with a smile. "But I suppose, as old Ralph is always saying, one must cease to rove about the world some day."

"Then the song would come true for you, too."

He looked as if he were about to say something impetuous, but he checked himself in time. "I live in hope that it will come true—the home to go to, not to leave. About this place;—there is an old house, and it has a bit of a history. It is nothing very grand or pretentious, but it was once upon a time a favourite hunting-lodge of Henry VIII., and there is a room still called after Anne Boleyn, where she is said to have slept. There is an inscription to Queen Elizabeth too, over the

entrance, in which they call her a "shining star of piety" and other flattering things, so, you see, it has a fine flavour of royalty about it."

"I like an old house, a house with a story," said Di, conscientiously trying, but with very poor success, to picture Philippa flitting about in the stately rooms, where the beautiful and unfortunate young Anne once queened it.

"Do you know those green Essex lanes? There is nothing like them in their own way for beauty."

She shook her head.

"I have never been there."

"Ah! I forgot this was your first visit to England. You must go. You should see the hedgerows there in June."

"Mamma was born there, but I don't know where; and an old friend of hers who could have told me died the other day." A little shade of sadness crossed her face.

"May I find out?" he asked gently; "it wouldn't be difficult, and then perhaps you would like to go yourself some day and see the place."

"I should like to see it, if you could find out."

"I will. I am going to take a run to Essex to-morrow, at any rate, to have a look at this place, and see if it is all it is said to be. And, if it should turn out a success, I was thinking, if

Lady Malleson and Miss Bell would consent, you would perhaps all take pity on me and give me your verdict. It's a very serious affair choosing a house, and there will be all sorts of alterations to make; and a man, you know, is perfectly helpless in such matters."

"I don't know. Bell must decide," she said hurriedly, rising as she spoke. She began to be afraid of these proposals for new days to be spent together. Either she was less strong than she supposed or her doubts more urgent.

After all, Felix had not said the words he meant to say. This was neither the place nor the hour to renew his pleading. Besides, as his love grew stronger there was in it more of timidity; he felt less sure of his worthiness, less hopeful.

At the best, while Bell's fingers were touching the last chords, he could but put in a plea for further grace.

"I have never given you Ralph's message," he said. "When I come back may I tell you about it? It is something that concerns me very nearly. You will listen to it, won't you?"

Surely her fancy must have passed away and touched the rim of the truth, for she paused, and the slow colour rose and ebbed again in her face before she spoke.

For a moment he hung as anxiously on her

answer as if he had given her the message and waited her decision.

She looked up and said with a smile—

"I always listen to what Ralph says. Yes, tell me when you come back."

CHAPTER VIII.

Give us leave, I pray, awhile;
We have some secrets to confer about . . .

READERS of fiction are well aware that it is part of the novelist's mission to create clouds, misunderstandings, rifts within the lute; shadows, in short, of one kind or another, in which the hero and heroine are to wander apart and disconsolate, until the sun bursts forth and shines on them in the last chapter.

While Di was being made much of, and *fêted* after the manner of a princess, fate was as remorselessly weaving a net for her feet as if she were an important heroine of romance. It was a long time, indeed, before she heard the message it had cost Ralph so dear to send, and on which Felix built so many hopes.

While she was heedlessly dreaming away the last of many pleasant hours, it is not to be supposed that Philippa and her mother were enjoying themselves. The dismal house at

Brompton had something to do with it, and the damaged furniture and broken tea-cups. The temper suffers from these things, and when you add to such small annoyances the mortifying knowledge that your friends have forgotten you, or, at least, got on very well without you, you have good ground to think ill of the world.

Mrs. Henshaw was, of course, well aware of Felix Chester's presence in London, and of the way in which he spent his days, and at this time she took an exceedingly morbid view of life. She used to hint darkly that faithfulness and constancy were virtues that no longer existed, and that it was her child's fate to be as miserable as she herself had been.

"Miserable!" said Philippa, whose distaste took another form; "I think some cheaper word might do. We have had our share of good things as well as others. I don't mean to sulk all day because the Baird Browns haven't asked me to their ball."

"That introduction to the De Lacys has spoilt them. I always thought Mrs. Baird Brown very frivolous."

"I'm not good enough for them now. It seems to me there are a good many people for whom I'm not good enough!"

Mrs. Henshaw looked at her oddly.

"I think I'll call on Miss Ouvry," she said.

"She has come here once or twice, and it would be only polite to return her visit. I might take her a little drive, the day you go to the dressmaker's. It will be something to do. I am sure she would like a little drive in the park. I dare say Mrs. Smith would lend me her carriage for the afternoon."

"Oh yes. Mrs. Smith has not dropped us. The yellow chariot is very imposing, and there would be room for all the ladies. I dare say you could find a corner for Mr. Chester, too, since I am not to be of the party."

"What sort of a person is this Miss Fullarton?"

"She is not a 'person' at all; she's a very discriminating young lady. I think Mr. Malleson would like her."

"What makes you think of him?" Mrs. Henshaw asked with a touch of sharpness.

"Oh, I don't know." Philippa opened her blue eyes. "I think of him very often. He is a sort of conscience to me. I can't afford to keep a conscience for myself."

"He is very rough and ill-mannered, I think; and after the trouble I took to please him!"

"That is just it," said Philippa, smiling to herself. "One's conscience is always dreadfully uncivil and plain-spoken."

"Well, go and put on your hat, and you can

post my note to Miss Ouvry on your way to the Smiths. But don't stay long, Philippa. I desire you to be polite; but the Smiths are not people I wish you to be very intimate with."

"I'll be very judicious," said the young lady gravely. "I'll hint to them gently that I am glad to know them till the De Lacys call on us. After that, it will be my painful duty to drop them."

"How often must I beg you not to talk like that, child! It is such bad taste. Here are the letters."

"Have you been writing to Mrs. St. John? Do you want an introduction to the American colony here, mamma?"

"I've been recommending Madame Duval to her." She arranged the scented sheets of paper with precise care in her desk as she spoke. "She is an excellent person, and such a good cook; and she would take any one on my recommendation, though she is so particular."

"I should not have thought Mrs. St. John needed advice about Paris."

"You heard her say she was going there immediately, and I am always glad to assist a friend if I can."

"I didn't know you were so fond of her."

Philippa looked for a moment at her mother, as if she would have asked her a question, but Mrs. Henshaw had already began another letter.

"Go away, child," she cried; "you fidget me so, standing there."

And Philippa went, her question unasked.

It took but a moment to post the notes, but the Smiths could not be treated so cavalierly. They were kindly people, and Philippa thought that they had been specially created to restore her self-respect. The world has a very engaging air so long as you ride through it at your ease, with lovers and friends bending low on every side of you; but when you have to walk in the dust, and are jostled by the crowd, you are glad enough of the homage of a Smith, and do not insist too rigorously on having the full complement of h's in the soothing things he says to you.

Philippa was made much of by this good-tempered household. The family chariot and any number of horses she might please to command were at her service. The Smith young ladies were very amiable. They admired Miss Henshaw's beauty and her graceful ways. They would have liked to offer her some of their superfluous finery, if that had been at all a possible thing to do. They longed to have a

brother, that he might immediately fall in love with this new and charming friend.

All this was very pleasant—pleasanter than the shabby Brompton drawing-room and her mamma's plaintive monologue. Philippa lingered, and was late in returning to her home. She knew in a moment, when she entered the dull, sunless room that something had happened. Disaster was in the very air. Her mother was idle—the letter unfinished. There were new signs of dejection in her attitude, she was huddled in one corner of the sofa, she looked shaken and cowed.

Philippa's mind went back in a flash to certain winter days in Madrid.

"Mamma," she said, pausing on the threshold, "what is it? Has any one been asking you for money?" Creditors clamorous for their due—this was the form of trouble with which she was most familiar.

"He was paid. When I made that sacrifice I did not think I should be called on to suffer any further humiliation. You have been cruel to me—an unnatural child!" Mrs. Henshaw's voice came muffled and faint from among the cushions.

"What is it, mamma?" She shut the door, and went forward, speaking gently. "I don't understand. Who has been troubling you?"

She stood with her hands clasped before her mother. "Tell me about it."

"It is you who should have told me; you said it was all at an end between you. What have I done that I should have such an ungrateful daughter!" She lifted her head and made a vague appeal to the furniture.

"Do you mean Mr. Ferryman?"

"He has been here." The mother spoke with growing agitation. "He has been saying dreadful things to me; he says it wasn't the money."

"He was glad enough to take the money," said Philippa, with a curling lip.

"He says you gave him a solemn promise that you would marry him in a year, when he gave you back the letters; and when I told him that could not be, he said he would make you tell me himself in his presence."

"Make me!"

"He says he will never give you up."

"If I give him up it will come to the same thing, I suppose?"

"You have behaved very badly," said Mrs. Henshaw, relapsing into querulous complaint. "You never think how all the suffering falls on me. How can I help you if you deceive them so? And you told me it was all at an

"Oh, how can I remember what I said!" Philippa exclaimed pettishly. "I dare say I made the most preposterous promises. I wanted to get rid of him. I would have agreed to travel to the moon with him in a year, just to purchase five minutes' freedom. If he believed me, he is not what I take him to be."

"It is exceedingly wrong, it is wicked to make promises that you don't mean to keep. I thought I had taught you better."

Philippa said nothing. Her mother's little moral maxims always reduced her to silence. Presently, touched by I know not what sorrowful feeling of comradeship—of fellowship in shabby deeds and low aims—she went and stood behind her mother's sofa.

"Poor little mamma, what a plague I am to you!" she said.

"He will come again. He makes my life wretched. I had such brilliant hopes for you; I am afraid of him."

"I am not." She lifted her head proudly. "If he comes again I will see him myself."

"No, no; you will not. I forbid it." She was clutched by the sleeve. "Do you hear me, Philippa, I forbid you to see him!"

"Very well, mamma," said the girl calmly "just as you like. We can run away instea

"He would follow us."

"He can't follow us everywhere; the cotton and the beer would suffer. Yes, we may as well go. England has not been so kind to us that we need regret leaving it; and discretion is perhaps the better part, since I have no champion now to adopt my cause!"

"My poor child!" Mrs. Henshaw made a futile effort to take her daughter's hand. "Oh, what it is to suffer from the treachery of a friend!" she said, with a quick change to sentiment. "It is just my story—just my own sad story, repeating itself. I suffer for you and with you, my Philippa!"

"But, indeed, I am not suffering!" cried Philippa gaily. "I am luxuriating in the thought of Paris. Madame Duval must take us instead of Mrs. St. John. How charmed the dear old woman will be to see us! You had better write to Di, and put off the drive in the yellow chariot. I'll seek out M. Adolphe, the pigeon-breasted, and send him over to England. Oh, how much he will like it!" she cried, in a mocking voice.

"How you talk!" said her mother; but she listened, a little consoled. For her, too, Paris seemed a city of refuge after England, which ... not been gracious to her. She was glad ..., but she decided in her own mind that ... vas no such haste, no such pressure that

the matter of the drive need be put off. She had already given strict orders that Mr. Ferryman was not again to be admitted, and even he would hardly insist on forcing his way to her presence.

She went alone to Kensington the next day. Di was ready dressed and waiting for her; she was almost eager to go. Some unspoken compunction filled her heart, when she thought that she had drifted a little apart from Philippa, who had been her dearest friend. She forgot the many times she had suffered in the older lady's company, and only remembered that she was Philippa's mother and her father's old friend.

There was no talk of Bell's or of madame's sharing the drive, and, indeed, they had not been invited. Madame was guilty of peeping behind the drawn blind at the handsome lady with the nodding plumes, who lounged among the cushions as if to the manner born. Then Di stepped in beside her, the footman banged the door, and they set off.

Madame looked with envious admiration at the spectacle; but Di's heart sunk when she found herself alone with her hostess.

"Philippa had an engagement; and, besides, I wanted you all to myself," she said. "I wanted to have a little talk with you."

She gave the order to drive to the country.

"It will be quieter," she explained, as they went towards Hammersmith.

At first they spoke of indifferent matters; but this light skimming over the surface of things was but the prelude to graver business.

"I wanted to speak to you about Philippa," said Mrs. Henshaw presently.

"Yes?" said Di, wondering, and a trifle anxious. "She is well?"

"She is well in health, poor child. She has a wonderful spirit."

"I have seen so little of her; but when Bell asked her she would not come."

"How could you expect it?" Mrs. Henshaw spoke with the gentlest reproach. "Do you think my child is made of stone; do you think she is marble—dead, without feelings; that she can look calmly on while another enjoys all that was once hers?"

Di's heart beat with a sudden alarmed throbbing; but she would not stoop to say she did not understand.

"No one wished to be unkind to her," she said faintly.

"Perhaps not; perhaps not." Mrs. Henshaw shook her head gently. "But what inconstancy! what treachery!"

"There was no treachery," said Di, sitting

up. She felt that this was unjust, and her sense of righteousness gave her strength to speak her mind. She, at least, had been true to Philippa. "I think you ought to know everything before you say that," she said bravely.

"I see my child suffering; isn't that enough for me? I see that the most solemn claims have been disregarded, the most binding promises broken, and you tell me there is nothing treacherous in that! Is it nothing that her love should be wasted, her life blighted?"

The lady had worked herself up into a very pretty indignation, though it was expressed with soft melancholy. She honestly believed that she and her daughter had a claim on the wayward young man who was in both minds, though his name had not been spoken by either. How else could she have taken money from him? Was it not because he was so much to her already, and one day to be her son that she had done it? But when she talked of wasted love and a blighted life, Di interrupted her. The words jarred on her; they rang false. She had a troubled doubt that it was not Philippa who would suffer, whose life would be desolate.

"Suppose he found out that he did not care for her enough—in that way," she said, though her voice was unsteady. "Are you not—will you not think a little of him? He has a right

to choose; he has his own life to think of." Her cheeks were glowing and she hung her head. If she was faithless to Philippa it was because she was faithful to something better. "You can't choose for another; you can't pass on love at will," she faltered.

"Ah! you think so now. You told me something very different once. It was you who gave me hope."

"Yes," said Di; "I believed it then. I believed it till to-day, I think; but I was wrong."

"He has made you believe that?"

"He never spoke of it. How could you think that of him!"

"You have been a false friend to my poor girl," cried the mother. "You, in whom she believed."

"No," said Di, looking bravely at her companion. "It may not seem so, but I have been true to her. I want her to be happy; but if he does not love her?"

"You mean that he loves you."

"I did not say it!" cried poor Di, shocked, ashamed, distressed. "Oh, you cannot think that I was pleading for myself!"

"Ah! but it is true. You cannot deny it. he saw you she was everything to him—ing; and now she is despised, slighted,

forgotten. And yet you wonder that she does not come to see you!"

"You don't understand," said Di, with rising agitation. "It is not as you suppose. I have not taken him from her."

"But you cannot deny that you love him."

She spoke calmly and with firmness. It was no moment to be angry. She had other shafts in reserve; she knew that in the end she must conquer. No thought of the pain and shame she was inflicting crossed her purpose. She was full of courage, for was she not fighting for her child?

The girl at her side found no words to answer this charge. Her lips refused to speak, but her heart cried out in sudden confirmation. It was true that she loved him. If she never knew it before, at least she knew it now. They were crossing Kew Bridge. The placid river stealing along in the sunshine reflected here and there a patch of sky; the quaint houses on the bank were half asleep, and in the slumberous stillness of the drowsy afternoon she heard but the one sound. It was an inarticulate voice, but the air seemed clamorous with it. "You love him!" A thousand echoes seemed to catch it up, and to repeat it endlessly—"You love him!"

"Listen," said Mrs. Henshaw, settling among the cushions, and lowering the

she carried. "I will tell you a story, my own story. When I was young, a girl like Philippa, and as pretty as she is now, they tell me, there was some one I loved." She paused, giving a moment's bitter and vainly regretful thought to that one true emotion of her life. "He cared for me; we were boy and girl together. He would have loved me in time," she went on hotly, almost vehemently; "and I should have made him happy, but another girl stepped in, and took him from me. That girl was your mother."

If she had wished to distract her companion's thoughts she had succeeded.

"Mamma!" said Di. "Oh, she can never have known that you cared for him." Then she was suddenly struck by the resemblance of the two experiences, and a multitude of hints and insinuations, hitherto not understood, rushed in upon her mind.

"She knew it; and you are doing what she did."

"I am sorry, very sorry if we have hurt you, mamma and I," Di faltered; "but as for papa, if it was mamma he loved—don't you see——?"

"Your father! I am not talking of your sh[illegible]r," Mrs. Henshaw interrupted quickly. She what [illegible]out to deal her last stroke, and even now "The [illegible]ory was in sight, she felt a momentary

pang of compunction. It was cruel, perhaps, and it was exceeding unpleasant, but she had her own child to think of. Then she remembered Ralph Malleson's last words: if he had not spared her, why should she spare this girl? He had ferreted out her secret; he had proclaimed it aloud, laughed and jested about it, no doubt; and was she to be more generous than he? She grew hard as she recalled his look and his words.

"The wrong did not end there," she said. "Your mother took him from me, but he did not marry her. That was her punishment. And if you succeed better, if you marry Felix Chester, you will be punished too. You will be sorry for it all your life."

"You have no right to say such things to me," cried Di, stung at last into indignant anger; "and I don't believe it—it is all false."

"But you must believe it; it is true. You will repent of it when it is too late; you will think of my words then. You will bring your husband a stained name, do you hear me? Would you like him to pity you, perhaps to despise you? You make me say hard things, but how can I help it? Your father is a disgraced man. He took money that was not his own—money that was my father's, and should have been mine. Do you understand now, how

much we have suffered at your hands; how much I have forgiven?"

During all the time in which these hot words were poured out on her, Di had sat in amazed and perplexed silence, her eyes fixed on the speaker's face; now she moved her head with a little gesture of pride and disdain, and her clasped hands relaxed their hold of each other.

"The padre!" she said; and there was supreme amusement in her tone, and in the smile with which she greeted this preposterous story. "You expect me to believe a wicked story like that—the padre steal money that belonged to you!"

"Ah, you may laugh now," said Mrs. Henshaw, bitterly mortified at this reception of the truth. She had expected the girl to be cowed, overwhelmed, bowed down with shame, and she sat erect with flashing eyes, and a proud disdain on her lips. "Ask others, who will tell you the same tale; you will not laugh then. Ask your friend Mr. Malleson; ask your father himself, he will hardly deny it; ask Mrs. Gordon, Mrs. St. John, any one you choose, since you refuse to believe my poor words."

"Ask them? That would be to doubt him and to believe you. Do you think, because you are disappointed—because you think we have hurt you, though we have not—that I shall look

on my father as a thiof, and my mother—oh, I will not speak of her to you! She was good, and you—you are cruel and wicked. I will get out here, if you please," she said, rising and stopping the coachman with an imperious little sign.

Her voice frightened the older lady into bewildered acquiescence. She was so hot, so fierce in her young indignation.

"I don't think I can ever speak to you again. You couldn't expect it, after the things you have said; but I'll always love Philippa," she added, with a break in her clear ringing voice.

Then she waved to the man to go on, and she was left alone in the straggling outskirts of Hammersmith. There were some small gutter children, who set up a shrill shout, and raced a little way after the stately yellow chariot, stirring the dust with their bare feet. Deonys laughed with them. She felt a strange inclination to mirth; she walked with a defiant head, and looked about her proudly. She felt strong enough to walk for a hundred miles, and the bit of bare road that divided her from her home looked all too short.

The blood was leaping and tingling in her veins; her feet felt winged. She never knew how hot the sun was, how still and oppressive the air. In this mood and mind she went home;

she pulled the bell with a steady hand, and marched upstairs with the bearing of a queen. She went straight to her own room, and took off her outer dress in haste, yet with orderly touches, folding and putting it away. Then at last she paused, while a sudden wild suspicion crossed her mind, that there would come a moment when she should have to think; till now there had been something to do.

She went and stood by the window, looking vaguely out. While she was still held in the clutch of that dread—the dread that she must by-and-by think and remember—the door opened, and her cousin came in.

"Look here, Di," she cried, and her voice expressed rare pleasure. "See what came when you were out. Flowers! country ones, wild ones; peep in here."

Then, surprised at the other's silence, she glanced up.

"What is it!" she cried in alarm. "Are you ill?"

Di lifted her hands as if to steady her lips, which were trembling; then, in a sudden need of comfort, of refuge from her alarm, she put her arms round her cousin's neck. "Oh, Bell, I am so miserable!" she sobbed.

CHAPTER IX.

"Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot,
Take thou what course thou wilt."

"Bring me no more reports: let them all fly."

MADRID is not a pleasant place in July. No shutters are close enough to exclude the pitiless sun; one suffers alternately from fevered heat and a deadly languor hardly more endurable; the day is a long purgatory, from which there is no deliverance till darkness conquers the light.

Malleson would not follow the universal example of flight. He took a dogged pleasure in staying on in the arid city, in being now burnt up and now chilled, while his friends took refuge in the mountains or by the sea. He said, in answer to every remonstrance, that he had work to do. He clung to this pretence of being too busy to spare a moment, even to thrust some shirts and a book or two into his

portmanteau. When he wrote to Di, his notes were scribbled with old Anchel grumbling at his ear, and announcing the closing hour to be perilously near. The one thing that he declared to be perfectly impossible, was his promised journey to England.

"I must break my promise for once," he wrote. "I can't get away. See what it is to be a toiler!"

Di read these letters with a sigh, and yet with a certain pride in Ralph's importance. She believed in all good faith that journalism would collapse without his strong support; that the great daily for which he toiled would become so much waste paper, should he desert it. He made a brave effort to have an equal faith in the value of his labours; to assure himself that England was waiting for his words of wisdom. The *cacoethes scribendi* had seized him, and he worked unremittingly, but it would not always do. There were times when his pen dropped from his fingers, when he was forced to think, when forgetfulness would not come at will—when he was conscious of a fierce, almost an overmastering longing for one glimpse of a sweet face far away.

At these times he could hardly restrain himself from rushing out and buying a ticket for London—then he remembered Felix, and sat

down again, pulling his papers towards him and dipping his pen grimly in the ink. Was he to travel all these miles only to listen to the boy's outpourings, to share his hopes and fears —perhaps to witness his success? The thought was not to be endured. The letters that were brought to him made epochs in his barren life. Di wrote regularly; honest little epistles, in which she told him everything very frankly—what she had seen, what she had done. Bell's opinions and maxims were largely quoted, sometimes in all reverence and faith, now and again with a spice of fun. He thought when he came to such passages that he could hear her merry laugh; and he looked up startled, to be met by the dull, blank indifference of his shabby furniture.

By-and-by Felix's name began to appear in these chronicles. It came in sparingly, and yet the written sheets seemed to be full of him. The phrases were artless and candid as ever; but to his jealous scrutiny there was a new tenderness, a new reticence in the very wording of the most commonplace item of news concerning him.

All this time he was waiting for her confession. He knew that if there were any to make it would be made to him, and that Felix would flood him with extravagant outpourings

of joy. He awaited this ordeal grimly; he told himself he was ready to face it. After it he promised himself a holiday, and a long one; he might even bring himself to go to England by-and-by, and congratulate these young people, who would count on his sympathy. But first they must claim it, and as yet no bold and triumphant announcement had come in Felix's scrawling, school-boy hand.

In the midst of all this absorbing toil he had preserved the one good habit of going out nightly for his supper. He had had thoughts, indeed, of renouncing this meal, or of making Anchel fetch it for him, but the latter plan had drawbacks. He could be deaf to the old serving man's muttered remonstrances, but he could not quicken his hobbling gait, or eat the tepid messes that at last reached him; and, after a little trial of abstinence, he gave in, like a wise man, and listened to the appeal of his appetite.

It was on one of his journeys to the café he frequented that he met Mrs. St. John, a late lingerer in the summer city. The American lady had no strong hold on his likings, and he was about to sneak past her, but she was determined not to be ignored.

She sailed down on him, barring his path; her maid lingered discreetly behind.

"Hot, isn't it?" he remarked, with great originality, hoping to be let off with a bow and a smile, but a hand was put out to detain him.

"Were you going to pass me?" she exclaimed. "Now, I call that real mean of you; and Madrid as deserted as a grave-yard. Why haven't you been to see me?"

"I've been busy," he answered, wondering how soon it would be possible to make his escape.

"Oh, don't tell me!" She tossed her pretty head. "That's what Mr. St. John says. I believe it's all an excuse. I guess you found time to go and see Mrs. Gordon."

"I've been nowhere, I assure you."

"Well, I'm not going to wait for Mr. St. John any longer. I declare I've wasted the whole summer waiting for him. I'm going off to-morrow. The major's going to take care of me. I guess it will be cooler in Paris, anyway."

Malleson murmured something to the effect that the major was greatly honoured.

"He's better than nobody," said the frank little lady. "Anyway, he's a man; but I'm about worn out looking after him. I've been round to his place to see that he's packed up."

"Ah, he is fortunate," said Malleson, supposing some reply was expected of him.

"He's such an old gossip; he's more like

a woman. He's so taken up with this story, you can't think; I dare say he's gone to your place to talk it over with you."

"Very likely," said Ralph, mentally resolving to extend his walk. He had no clue to the story hinted at, nor had he any desire to possess one. The words, indeed, hardly entered his brain at all.

"Well, you do take it coolly!"

"Do I?" he said, smiling vacantly. "I thought I did my share of grumbling at the heat."

"I don't believe you're listening. I think you might have told me!" cried his companion, suddenly remembering to feel aggrieved. "I've been so dull, too!"

She stood there before him in her elegant summer flounces, effectually barring his path, and now she was pouting and shooting at him glances of lively reproach.

He wondered what it was all about.

"You knew I was dying for some news. It's a real queer story."

"No doubt," said Malleson desperately, floundering deeper and deeper into difficulties.

"Well, *you* ought to know. It was real sly of her to come here and make such friends with us all, and to keep so quiet. I guess she was no better than the rest of us, though she was

so strict with that girl of hers. Mr. St. John says he knew it all along, but that's nonsense. It's just that he likes to think he knows more than others. I've noticed that in men; they like to be masters in everything."

"We strive to keep up a poor semblance of authority," said Malleson, with a dismal attempt at liveliness. "So you are going off to-morrow? Then I must wish you——"

"I declare," she said pensively, interrupting his farewell, "I don't know what Laura will say to me for letting that man come to our ball. She's so strict; she's got such notions; she's what I call a perfect Puritan."

"You are going to Paris, you know, so she won't be able to scold you," he answered at random. "Good-bye, and much happiness."

He was congratulating himself on his escape when he heard little pattering steps behind him, and a shrill clear voice calling him by his name.

"Mr. Malleson," said the lady, breathless and hot, "I declare I'm half dead with running. I wanted to say to you that I'm downright sorry for that poor little girl—your friend, you know. It wasn't her fault, I guess; and I do think it was mean to write about her as she did. She's done nothing to make folks despise her. You tell her that I'll stick by her whatever they

may say. I can make the men behave well to her, anyway. They've all got to obey me"—she threw up her head, and looked at him with a laugh—"and when you have the men on your side you're all right, you know."

This time it was the lady who fled, and the gentleman who stood rooted to the spot staring blankly after her.

What did this vulgar, horrible little person mean? All his insular prejudices rose up in arms against her foolishness—her too great frankness; and when a dim suspicion entered his mind that it was Di whom she meant to patronize and defend, the blood pulsed in angry leaps through his veins, and mounted in dull red to his brow. It was well for her that she had fled. His little Di, in need of her protection, her pleading! He laughed at the very thought. His amazement and indignation so filled his mind, that he forgot altogether the scraps of intelligence that had reached him through Mrs. St. John's talk; he only knew that in some unkind fashion rumour had been busy with Di's name, and that was enough for him.

He entered the café, and almost mechanically gave his order, thinking with even a touch of amusement of the audacity of the lady's speech. He had no sooner taken his seat at one of the

little marble-topped tables, than a man crossed to him from the other side of the room, bringing his wine-glass and newspaper with him.

Malleson had hardly more than a nodding acquaintance with this new-comer, but in the dearth and emptiness of the city the few lingerers were glad to draw together; and Mr. Ponsonby paid himself the poor compliment of dreading to be alone.

"Queer story this, of Ouvry," he remarked, after they had discussed the weather and matters political.

"I've heard nothing," said Malleson curtly. So then it was Di's father they were talking of? His brow darkened; he looked very forbidding.

"No? You've been shutting yourself up, eh? These things get about so soon—I thought you must have heard."

"I have been busy," said Malleson shortly. "Nobody was obliging enough to come and tell me. You are my first informant."

"Well," said Mr. Ponsonby, pulling his grey whiskers, not ill pleased at this distinction, "I always thought he was rather shady myself. I've put it to Mrs. Ponsonby more than once like this: "Here is Ouvry, by his own showing, the longest here of any of us, if you except the major. It's a goodish bit of a man's life that,

and yet you never hear of his running over to England. It's odd that a man shouldn't care to pay a visit now and again to his own country. It makes you think, you know, that it's because he daren't. That's what I've said to my wife more than once."

"You've been here yourself a good while," said Malleson rather brutally.

"I go to England every year or two. I presume you don't mean to hint that *I* require to keep on this side of the Channel," said the little man showing some natural irritation.

"Certainly not," said Malleson coldly.

"We are going again— in a fortnight," fumed the other. "We are going to visit Mrs. Ponsonby's relations in Dorsetshire; and I must say it's—ah, well, it's unpleasant——"

"I intended no offence," said Ralph, rising and pushing back his chair—he left his supper untasted; "but at the same time can't you suppose that a man may have some other motive rather than the worst for not desiring to revisit his own country? She has been a hard enough stepmother to some of us," he added bitterly.

He turned away as he spoke and, nodding a good-night, left the café.

Mr. Ponsonby stared after him wrathfully. He had been snubbed, and balked at the same time of a good story; and it was not in human

nature to pardon the slight. He used, henceforward, to shake his head and hint darkly that Malleson's views were peculiar. You could not stir him from his indifference by the worst news; there was something quite immoral about his laxity. That was what came of living in a foreign land without the saving influence of a periodical visit to England.

Ralph had heard too much for his peace. That people's tongues should be set a-wagging about Di's father was enough. He did not care to learn the particulars of the long-hidden deed that had been disinterred, and was now being discussed with so much candour by his friends. He was thinking chiefly of the little girl in England, with a thankful heart that she was so far away—so far beyond reach of the pain he was suffering on her account.

This was, then, the news Mrs. St. John was so anxious to share with him. "Trust a woman to take care of your reputation," he said to himself, with half whimsical scorn. "She will sacrifice it for the sake of five minutes' amusement." There was, indeed, something pagan in her frank seizure of this relief to her dullness; it might be his turn next to enliven the lady's idle hours. Ponsonby was little better than an old woman in his love of gossip; he would unhesitatingly offer up his dearest friend for the

chance of a story that told well. In the dearth and dullness of the city a hint of a mystery was as good as a windfall. No doubt this fine breath of scandal had already penetrated to every corner of the Barrio Salamanca, where the English colony had established itself. It would not be the fault of these babblers if it failed to follow those who had gone to the mountains and the sea.

It did not strike him yet to wonder how this rumour had arisen, how it had been raised out of the grave where it had slept so long and so peacefully; it was there facing him, that was enough. Nor did he disbelieve it; he knew it was true.

He went out and walked aimlessly towards the Puerta del Sol, remembering to avoid his own street, where the major was no doubt lying in wait for him with another version of the story. After the hermit-like life he had been living so long, it was strange to him to mingle again with the crowd which thronged the streets now that the hottest hours were over. He seemed to have been suddenly thrust into a new world; he had not had time to collect or arrange his thoughts, which passed aimlessly from Di's father to Di herself safe in England. He remembered his talk with Mrs. Gordon. Here, then, was the clue which he had declared he would have followed ruthlessly to the end. Now

that it was in his hands he felt no desire to know more. He was neither contemptuous, nor angry, nor pitiful. It appeared to him as if he had known from the very first that there was an underside to his friend's pleasantness, and the revelation did not come on him with any sharp surprise; it hardly as yet touched him. He was chiefly bent on remembering with pleasure how far off England was; what a wide sea rolled between; and how slow even the ugliest gossip would be in reaching that distant shore.

While busy thus with his ponderings, he had unconsciously turned into the Calle Preciados. This street was quieter than those he had left, for most of the holiday-makers had already reached the Prado, to which the music was calling them. He had not proceeded many steps when he saw the man he most wished to avoid advancing to meet him. There was pride in the major's bearing, and a great disdain in the carriage of his head. Ralph looked about him for a means of escape from this irate military man; the one thing he could not do was to stand and listen. He was about to dive into an open doorway when he felt a touch upon his shoulder.

"I was coming to you," said Mr. Ouvry, in his softest tone; he passed his hand through

Malleson's arm. "Were you going to my rooms? Ah, there is the major," he said, before Ralph could reply. He withdrew his hand, and held it out to the new-comer. "A hot night," he said pleasantly. "I hear you are going off to-morrow."

Major Gibbs paused in front of them. It was a great moment for him. His cheeks were a dull red; his eyes glared under his bushy brows. He ignored the outstretched hand; his voice was wrathful, but he spoke with dignity.

"Sir," he said, "I'll thank you not to address me again till you have cleared yourself of the scandalous rumours that have arisen about you. I am a gentlemen, sir, and used to the company of gentlemen. I decline, sir, to have anything to do with you till you have cleared yourself. I'm not a Puritan, God knows, but I'm a man of honour, and there are some things I can't stomach."

Malleson forebore in pity to glance at his companion, while the major spoke; but he was startled next moment to hear Mr. Ouvry's voice, clear and soft as ever, perhaps even slightly amused.

"Come, major," he said, "this is hardly a way to treat an old friend and school-fellow. You take for granted I am guilty, and you don't even tell me of what offence I am accused."

"Don't call yourself a friend of mine, sir!" interrupted the angry soldier, garnishing his talk with expressions that need not be recorded. "Clear yourself, first!"

"Come, come, major," said Mr. Ouvry, still bland and good-humoured, but with a spark of fire in his cold eye. "Be a little more guarded."

But the wrathful major would not listen. He was purple with anger, his dignity had vanished. "Don't address me, sir," he cried. "Stick to your own friends"—he glanced scornfully at Malleson—"they are not so particular, it would seem."

He walked down the street, the embodiment of outraged, indignant virtue. Mr. Outry looked after him with a thin smile curling his well-cut lips. Then he turned to Ralph with a shrug.

"He was always hasty. What was it they used to call him at school? Firebob Gibbs! A good name, eh? Come up to my rooms; I wanted to have a talk with you. I'm going off to-morrow, too. The heat has conquered even me this year."

He spoke so easily that Malleson was rendered dumb out of sheer surprise, and followed him without a protest. He had not failed to notice the major's sneers. He was taken for the friend of this man, about whom evil things were spoken;

he had identified himself with him—with Di's father.

When they got upstairs his host produced wine and cigars, and flung himself into the easy chair.

"Won't you come with me?" he said. "I've heard of some new ground down in the south-east, where you can live snugly and cheaply, you know—always a great matter that, for a poor man like me. It hasn't got into the guide-books yet. Blackburn told me of it; he's keeping it a secret, in case the place should get talked of and the prices be raised. A find like that is as good as a treasure."

Malleson had pushed aside his unfilled glass. He stood up and leaned against the mantelpiece; he felt as if he were in a dream, and his voice sounded odd and harsh to himself when at last he spoke.

"What is that they are saying about you?" he asked abruptly.

Mr. Ouvry shrugged his shoulders once more.

"How can I tell you?" he said, almost as if he found the question amusing. "They will say anything."

"Is it true?" said Malleson again, hardly knowing why he asked the question. He knew it was true.

"I suppose most of us have committed a few peccadilloes in our day," said the other, with an air of answering patiently. "You can always find something to rake up against a man if you go far enough back, and you may trust the women to worm out your secrets if you have any."

"Does Di know of this?" Malleson demanded suddenly, as a new fear crossed his mind. He was not for a moment deceived by this easy protestation of innocence—of being no worse than another—and he took no pains to hide his scorn.

"Di knows nothing to my discredit," said her father quietly, and for the first time with, perhaps, a touch of shame. "She is a good child. She loves me."

"She would not be so base as to tell her," said Ralph, unconsciously doing his thinking aloud.

Mr. Ouvry looked at him sharply, but the next moment he spoke lightly.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I think you are all using me very badly. I speak to you as one man of the world to another—is it fair to gather up all a man's youthful sins, and to hurl them at him when he has had time to forget them? I grant you I committed follies enough in my day; as for money I never understood anything about it—I never had enough of it. I

don't pretend to be nicer than others; I dare say I have been worse than many—less virtuous, perhaps, than our friend the major—but I ask you again, is it fair to judge and condemn me on the mere word of a spiteful woman—a disappointed woman, I may say?" He smiled to himself. "You know the ladies are always given to exaggeration."

"I don't want to know any of your secrets," said Ralph, using the fewest possible words. "If it is a question of money, I have some that I don't want."

The older man looked at him with mild surprise. He honestly failed to understand him; he also honestly believed that he was being very badly used.

"Are you proposing to lend it to me?" he asked. "My dear fellow, it's hardly a safe thing to do. With the best will in the world to remember, I might forget to return it."

"I am thinking only of your daughter," said Malleson haughtily. "Understand that nothing but the wish to save her pain would induce me to meddle in your affairs."

"Di is a good child," said her father softly; "and my dear boy, as to my affairs, you know as much of them as I do. The lady makes a claim on me, it would seem. I gather that is what they are talking about. She may be

right; I don't deny it; and you come and offer me money to meet it. That I can understand; so far it seems plain enough to me."

"Let me know how much you want."

Malleson looked steadily at Di's empty chair, and at her work-basket with the bit of work hanging out of it. He felt if he took his eyes from these reminders of her that his scorn would leap out and wither his companion.

"Thank you," said Mr. Ouvry pleasantly. "As I said just now, I never had enough money. It is always acceptable; and, as you hint, it is as well to settle the most absurd demands, if it were only to silence the chatter of the ladies. Then you won't come south with me?"

"No," said Malleson curtly, lifting his cap and turning away without so much as a good-night.

He walked quickly through the city. When he got out beyond the streets into the open country on which the stars looked down, he paused. He had been walking at a furious pace; and the man he had left behind was smoking quietly and at his ease. He had no superfluous sensibility; he had not imagination enough to feel uncomfortable.

"Oh, Di," said Ralph, with a groan, "what hard things I have to do for you!"

He had gone further than he thought. He

had reached that high north suburb, where the houses are lonely and few. In one of them he saw a light twinkling feebly; it was very high up, and it came from the little room where Miss Piper sat solitary among the relics of the past. He looked at it, and a great wish seized him to go and spend an hour with the little spinster, and to talk to her of Di.

He remembered how the girl loved this foolish, feeble little woman, and how she, in her turn, clung to and almost worshipped Di. He wanted to hear her gentle prattle of how she missed her; her hourly wonders of what she was doing in the great, wicked world; her sighs and hopes that she would come back to them soon.

He wanted to get rid of the sick distaste of life that oppressed him, to recover the old saving belief in human goodness, to forget all he had just seen and heard.

CHAPTER X.

Cel. "But is all this for your father?"
Ros. "No; some of it is for my father's child. O, how full of briars is this working-day world!"

When Di put her arms round her cousin's neck, she could hardly tell what impulse led her to ease her mind of its burden, but in ten minutes everything had been told.

She could not have confided her trouble to Madame Lavoisier, who appeared to be a much more sympathetic person, nor yet to Lady Malleson. Perhaps it was Bell's great reputation for common-sense that made her seem a refuge from the wild doubts that were assailing her. Bell, with her clear, cold way of looking at things, would soon dissipate fears that were no doubt imaginary.

But Bell was strangely and dreadfully silent. She had learnt something else, something more than she was meant to know, and this revelation that came to her in faltering words and pauses of silence, seemed to her more

disastrous than the unmasking of her uncle. But for Di's pain, she would almost have taken a kind of righteous pleasure in the poetic justice that was being dealt out to him; even the best of us rejoice when Tartuffe is found out. But with Di's tragic, woe-begone young face confronting her, Miss Bell remembered to be merciful.

"Of course it is not true," Di said, first defiantly; and then, when her cousin did not at once reply, she said again, "Of course it isn't," but this time falteringly.

"Some of it isn't true," Bell spoke at last, dropping her eyes; "I'm very sure of that. And it was all so long ago——"

"Then that was why you pitied me!" said Di, feeling as if the last wave of bitterness had passed over her.

"Did I show it you? I only meant to be kind." Bell spoke humbly. She was sorry, yet she felt it was a case for bracing treatment. "There is no good to be gained by magnifying matters," she went on, taking courage. "I can't have you making yourself ill and miserable about this. You must rouse yourself, and not brood over it. If my uncle was—unfortunate" (it cost her a struggle with conscience to use this word), "that is all past ages ago. We can't tell anything of the circumstances,

and we have no business to judge. There is far too much ignorant fault-finding in the world," she said, feeling that her defence was very weak, and taking refuge in sententiousness.

Di smiled faintly. It was so easy to tell her not to worry; and as for judging, Bell's opinion had not been hard to read.

"If you would leave me alone for a little—just an hour or so—I'll come down at dinner-time," she said in her sick misery at finding herself uncontradicted.

"You had much better go to bed," said Bell decidedly, removing the quilt and smoothing the sheet. "You would not care to see any one to-day."

"No one will come," said Di quickly, meaning that one person would not come, and thinking she, too, with a thankful heart, that Essex was beyond the reach of immediate news.

"No, very likely not; but you will rest better. I will bring you up some dinner."

"I don't want any dinner."

"That's all nonsense. You will eat what I bring you."

Di submitted unresistingly, and let herself be tucked up carefully. Bell darkened the room, and went away with a parting admonition that she was to go to sleep and not to think, leaving her at last to merciful silence.

Miss Fullarton's movements that afternoon were very mysterious. She denied herself to visitors, and went about the house with a great appearance of business.

Madame, from the depths of her easy-chair, followed her wistfully with her looks. She had a letter in her pocket, and she was burning to disclose its contents, but Bell's mood was not propitious. Madame's offers to go and sit with the little cousin, who was supposed to have a headache, were declined.

"You had better leave her alone," said Bell, with ominous gravity, going on with her task of collecting the little bits of personal property scattered about the room. A sudden rage for tidiness seemed to have seized her.

"Packing already!" said madame at last, as a suspicion of the truth flashed on her.

Then Bell came and stood near her by the window. Her arms were full of neat little parcels.

"You will drop them. Much better let Morris do that, my child."

"Morris has more than she can do already. We must go away."

"In a week—yes." Madame bowed to the necessity with a sigh. "But is it needful to make one's self uncomfortable eight days too soon?"

"But we can't wait a week. We must go at once—to-morrow."

She laid down her burden carefully on the tiger-skin at madame's feet, and clasped her hands.

"I wanted to tell you," she said solemnly; "but you mustn't contradict me. I am quite sure I am right. Something has happened, and we must go away at once—before——"

"Before the young man can return from the country?"

Madame smiled at the young girl's earnest face, and at the length of her upper lip. This off-hand way of settling what she supposed might be a lover's difference amused her.

"How did you find out?" Bell demanded.

Madame was charmed with this tribute to her acuteness.

"I have two eyes in my head," she said. "He has displeased her, and you are going to punish him by carrying her off, eh?"

"No, not that; but she must never see him again. He is a very nice young man; but she will soon forget him. I have not made up my mind that she cares for him at all."

"Perhaps if one were to wait and see," madame hinted softly. She did not like to be deprived in this summary manner of a romantic interest that gave a flavour to life.

"That is just what we must not do," Bell rejoined, in her dogmatic way. "She must never be tempted. She could not marry him; she must never marry any one at all. She will come to see it herself by-and-by."

"She has been giving her a little history of the father," madame immediately said to herself, marvelling at the slender stock of tact with which some people are endowed; but aloud she only remarked—

"We can't forbid him to visit Scotland."

"I know. Of course he would follow us, and that is why we must not go there." She spoke with great firmness. She had made the heroic resolve to abandon her native country for the sake of Di, who was to be healed and cured by a season of foreign travel.

Madame put her hand into her pocket and felt the letter there.

"The best place to distract one's self——" she was beginning lightly, but Bell interrupted her sternly.

"No, not Paris. How could you be so unfeeling! A great staring, noisy place like that!"

"There is so much to see; and in these cases one must throw one's self into gaieties. There must not be time to think. Ah! my child, I have had so much experience."

Bell shook her head.

"You don't understand, Di. She would not like it. What we want is a quiet place, away from everybody here. Do you remember that little village near the Rhine, that you admired so much?"

"I remember the sauer kraut and the sausages and the hardness of the beds. Oh yes, I remember it." She gave a little shudder.

"It was very nice. You said yourself it was delightfully rural. And you learned so much German, talking with that old colonel or major with the wig."

"He was explaining the German attitude in the war," madame protested faintly. "Of course he could not convince me; but it is only fair to listen to both sides."

"Oh, quite fair. Perhaps he will be there again to drink the waters, and you can finish the argument. Besides, if you are very nice indeed," she added, with something almost approaching a caress, "I'll think about Paris in the autumn or winter, or perhaps next spring."

"What a pity there is not to be a wedding." Madame spoke plaintively, hardly consoled by this dim and uncertain prospect. "Think of the trousseau! We might have gone there now about the clothes."

"You must not dream of such a thing."

Bell grew solemn again. "Di must never marry. I always told you so."

"Why did you encourage him, then?"

"I didn't encourage him," said Bell indignantly. "Am I to suppose that every man who comes to the house is going to fall in love with one of us, and to shut the door on him to save ourselves from the danger? I didn't think you were so silly!"

"Oh, I am very foolish," said madame, laughing softly. "I have heard of young people having hearts."

"Nonsense!" said Bell sharply. "Di may have as much heart as she likes, but not for *that* sort of thing. And I don't think it is such a very miserable fate." She lifted up her head. "For my part, I think it is better to leave the experiment alone."

"He will marry the other one. She will not refuse him."

"Oh, very likely." Bell pressed her lips together. "Men are like that. If they can't get one, another will do."

"She will do very well. She is very pretty."

"I don't think she is nice."

"Ah, she is English, poor thing," said madame, without a suspicion of a smile.

Bell looked at her sharply. Then she stooped to pick up her parcels.

"We are wasting time," she said, "and there is so much to do. You must help me."

"And the servants, have you considered their objections?"

"I don't make my arrangements to suit them," said the young mistress of the house firmly.

"It is the age of obedient mistresses," murmured madame. "I hope you have prepared Morris's mind."

"I told her first," Bell acknowledged reluctantly. "She will go with us."

"Then there is nothing more to be said. If Morris consents, I am dumb."

"And you will not tell any one where we are going? It is for Di. You must see that it is best for her; you know I am only thinking of saving her pain," she said, with a touch of entreaty in her tone.

"My child, we will fly," said madame, rising gracefully. "I seal my lips; it is a profound secret. But he will follow us," she said to herself. "If he is the young man I take him to be, we shall see him before so very long."

Where was the robust common-sense with which Miss Bell's friends were so eager to credit her? They had a good many faults to find in her. They discovered her to be cold and undemonstrative, full of "notions," absurdly

proud of her nationality; but these defects were always balanced in this mental summing up by her undue share of sound practical judgment.

"She's so sensible," cried the critics. But if she was indeed the wise young woman they took her to be, would she so steadily have counselled her cousin to fly? Would she not have hesitated a moment before she condemned two innocent young people to a perfectly useless and unnecessary sacrifice? Was it wise, oh calm and farseeing Miss Bell, to despoil two lives for the sake of a phantom—an old shadow of wrong and shame? Was life to be discrowned and love denied because one gentleman had strayed from the right path in the days of his hot youth? Was it not said of old, that there comes a moment when loyalty to father and to mother must cease?

Some such vague thought was passing through Di's mind, though she did not give it expression. She was leaning back among the pillows, and there was a great shadow of trouble on her young face.

Bell had seated herself on the edge of the bed, and was saying, in that calm, passionless voice of hers, that they might as well go away to-morrow; and why not abroad? She tried to remark easily that it would be a pleasant change, but the words stuck in her throat.

"I am sure you must see that it is best," she said lamely.

Di knew very well what was meant. The existence of such a person as Felix Chester had not been even remotely hinted at, but each girl was well aware of what was passing in the other's mind. They were to steal out of England secretly, before the young man could come back triumphant and successful, to trouble them with his appeals and his protests.

"I suppose you are right," Di said quietly. She had thought of it all to weariness, and now she could think no more. She yielded to Bell's stronger will and stifled her own lingering doubts. It was only a little while ago that she had wondered whether loyalty to Philippa demanded any further sacrifice, and now she must go away without seeing Felix again, without hearing the message from Ralph that was to decide so much.

"Oh, padre," she said softly under her breath. She did not want to go to him, not yet; not till she could forget a little.

"I dare say Germany will be very nice," she said, with a pitiful pretence at cheerfulness; "but you wanted to go to Scotland."

"Yes, but we can go another time—later. You will stay with me always, now, Di. You will learn to love Scotland, too."

Di said nothing, but she knew that the time would come when she should return home and take up the old life—only not quite yet.

"I'll get up and pack," she said, sliding off the bed in spite of Bell's remonstrances.

That young woman took a stern view of duty, but there was remorse and relenting in her heart. It took the shape of gruel and negus, of oppressive attentions and offers of help, till Di was fain to resist with an appearance of mirth, and to protest that she was quite well.

"Look, you forgot your flowers, and they are all withered—only fit to throw out." She laughed as she looked at the faded hedgerow treasures, that had come from the green Essex lanes. "You thought they could live on nothing, but they couldn't; they are dead."

She whisked down her gowns from the wardrobe and began to fold them with feverish haste and such an air of energy, that Bell, who had a limited imagination, was more than ever sure that she was right.

"I think my plan will do; it will turn out very well," she said, sedately entering the drawing-room. "I was sure she didn't really care for him."

"Then we may dine," said madame comfortably.

Under this energetic young person's rule

everything was accomplished by the next afternoon. The aggrieved servants were dismissed, and the keys delivered over to the house agent's care.

When the last box was strapped, and there was still an idle hour or two to be consumed before there was a decent pretext for driving to the station, Di slipped out to post a lettor she had sat up late to write.

Now, who should she meet at the corner near the pillar-box but Philippa, who was also about to post a letter. Di's pulses gave a faster throb, but she was hardly surprised. She had somehow known instinctively that they should meet; and perhaps Philippa, in spite of her exclamations, was not altogether unprepared for the interview. She had an elaborate air of taking it to be the most natural thing in the world that she should walk to Kensington with her correspondence, as if the receiving offices at Brompton were to be regarded distrustfully; and she said nothing of having paced the quiet street for an hour or more before finally resigning her letter.

She made a little rush at Di, and seized her hand.

"How nice this is!" she said, with all her old cordiality. "We see so little of each other now. I think this stiff old England must be

freezing us into propriety—prunes, prudence, and the rest of it. What has become of you all this time, Di?"

"I don't know. I can't stay now, Philippa."

"Is Miss Bell such a jailer?"

"It is good-bye," said Di gently. "We are going away this evening."

"To-night? So Miss Bell is homesick? Let me look at you, little one. Do you know, you look like a young lady at the end of her first season. Have you been dissipating so much? I think your cousin is quite right—you want some Scotch breezes."

"We are not going to Scotland."

"Not! Then you must be a witch." Philippa showed all her dimples.

"We are going to Germany, to a little village somewhere near the Rhine. It is far away, and a quiet place, where nobody would be likely to come. That is why we are going. It is a place where English people are never seen."

"Di," said Philippa, speaking with sudden earnestness, "why are you going away? Am I not to ask? You used to tell me things."

"Don't you know?" Di looked at her steadily. Philippa's blue eyes fell before the glance.

"I am going away because—I have been

hearing sad things. It is good-bye, Philippa, good-bye, for always, and—I hope you will be very happy."

The faltering voice ceased suddenly, and when Philippa looked up Di was gone. She made a hasty step forward. Her lips parted. "Di," she called faintly, "Di, come back." Then some people came out of a neighbouring house, and the quiet street seemed full of their laughter and talk. With a sudden revulsion of feeling, Philippa turned and went her way, her better impulse chilled within her.

And so this dear intimacy passed out of her life.

CHAPTER XI.

"Quien no ama, no vive."

Duke F. "Can it be possible that no man saw them?"
1st Lord. "I cannot hear of any that did see her."

Who more gay, more full of high hopes than Felix, as he rode through the liberal green Essex lanes? The house doubly deserved the praises of his friend. It was a place to make the heart of its possessor swell with a gentle pride. He looked with an air of ownership at the inscription over the arched entrance, and he thought bluff King Hal the most jovial and virtuous of princes, and Anne Boleyn, whose name and memory cling to the room in the turret, the most beautiful lady in the world, except one.

The long, low panelled room which had echoed to the rioting of princes, should be filled again with a worthier mirth. He was a young man of taste, and he had already, in imagination, furnished it with strange hangings of oriental stuffs, with Venetian mirrors, brasses, bronzes, and replicas of meek madonnas and martyred

saints. There should be tapestry, too, such as he remembered in a little room in the far south; and the Rastro should be made to yield up all its hidden treasures. How good it was to be rich! He had never before known the full charm of wealth.

Beneath the windows was a ragged garden, in which he saw great possibilities of beauty. The ancient care-taker, who hobbled with him through the echoing corridors hinted that the place needed a mistress. Felix thought him the cleverest old man, and gave him a noble gratuity. He was in a rosy mood, and failed to see damp or mould, decline or decay. He listened in an indulgent humour to the garrulous outpourings of his companion, who plied him with story after story, thinking nothing too marvellous for this greedy hearer. Life was beautiful, and England fairer than any land across the sea. He had never felt so patriotic, so full of longing to possess a home in his own land. He said a great many wise things to himself about the necessity of settling down and ceasing to rove; he recalled much excellent advice, to which he had before given but a cold attention. And now he, too, was eager to give hostages to fortune; to prove himself worthy of the blessings that had been granted to others.

He seemed to see himself a better and a manlier man as he walked about the old house and thought of the sweet girlish presence that might fill it soon. He lingered so long that the late summer twilight spent itself, and the old man lit a guttering candle, happy to guide this princely youth so long as it might be his pleasure.

"Take care, sir!" he cried in his quavering voice, as Felix stumbled over an unseen step and recovered himself with a laugh. Then he told another ghostly and blood-freezing tale of a tragedy that was associated with that spot, at which Felix laughed the more. He was in strangely high spirits, and astonished the old man, who had seen many foolish gentlemen but none so foolish as this; he could have wished such a visitor every day of his life, he thought, as he glanced at the coins in his palm, and then at Felix speeding away in the distance.

It was ten miles to the small market town where the railway ended, but he was in no haste. The summer night was sweet, and there was somewhere a veiled and vaporous moon, that revealed the white road twisting between the broad and lavish hedgerows. There was no sound abroad, except the regular beat of his horse's hoofs, and now and then the bark of a dog yelping with impotent anger behind

a farm-yard gate. By-and-by, when the cold air touched the heated earth, wreaths of mist began to rise from the fields, and to grow and spread and cling about the trees, which presently took the most fantastic shapes and looked like a company of giant spectres striding across the sleeping land.

Felix slackened his rein. His heart was full of happy dreams. He could scarcely believe his good fortune, and yet he felt more than hopeful; for she had promised to listen to Ralph's message, and had he not read the timid kindness in her eyes?

The virtuous little market town was abed when he rode over its stony street, and hardly a twinkling light greeted him; but the sleepy ostler, who took his horse, felt sure in anticipation of a handsome gratuity, for he had never seen a man look on better terms with the world.

And so, despite the theory which some people hold, of presentiments, warnings, and intercommunion of souls, Felix went back to London the happiest and hopefulest of foolish lovers, and knew no more than his neighbour in the railway carriage that Di was already hundreds of miles beyond his reach.

That blow was to descend upon him in the afternoon, when he went to Kensington in a hansom. He banged the doors open and sprang

out on the pavement, cheerful and brave. Fate was going to be kind to him, and give him the chances he sought; and lo! fate met him with a closed door and drawn blinds, and a card stuck in the window, with the intimation that the house was to let, furnished—"Apply to Mr. Mortimer Sharp."

Felix stared blankly at the printed words. Not Aladdin, when he was first whisked away on the carpet, was more full of wonderment than he. He passed his hand across his eyes, and asked himself if he were in a dream. Then he tried the next house, sure that he laboured under some odd delusion as to the number, though he could have sworn that the trim and precise plot of garden ground bore unquestionable witness to Miss Bell's presence.

But this hope speedily deserted him. The maid who opened the door declined loftily to give him any help. She didn't know what had become of the ladies, though she did see their luggage—and plenty of it, too—carried out. "She wasn't given to take notice of her neighbours," she remarked, with a toss of her head.

Back then once more to the High Street, into another hansom, and off as fast as the horse would go to the agent whose name was announced on the card; and who gave him a bland reception, thinking him to be a client,

but waxed cooler presently, as Felix grew pressing in his inquiries.

"Miss Fullarton only had the house to the end of the month," he explained.

"But it's eight days to the end of the month," Felix exclaimed weakly.

"Parties don't always stay to the last." Mr. Mortimer Sharp spoke civilly, but not encouragingly. "He understood that Miss Fullarton had a place in Ireland, or Scotland, or it might be in the north of England; he really couldn't say where."

"Of course she has gone to Scotland. I thought of that," said Felix in an injured tone; "but it's ten days before her time."

Mr. Mortimer Sharp once more "really couldn't say. Parties often left a week before their time was up; there was nothing unusual in that. Miss Fullarton had said nothing when she wrote to him about the keys. Perhaps she might have left her address with some of her friends; or the gentleman might apply to some of the tradespeople in the neighbourhood; the servants were likely enough to have mentioned their mistress's plans."

Felix looked at his adviser gloomily. Wasn't he a friend; and who had a better right than he to be told of their intentions?

Lady Malleson was superintending the bath-

ing of the twins that same evening when a loud summons was heard at the front door, and a young gentleman was announced. He was waiting below in urgent haste to see her.

She went down, trembling and afraid. Ever since she had discovered unsuspected depths in her husband's life, she had walked in fear of retribution overtaking her. From beyond the grave Roderick's will seemed still to overshadow her.

It was a relief to find that the drawing-room held no more alarming presence than that of Felix, even though it was an impatient and lugubrious Felix.

"Back again!" she said, welcoming him gladly. "I couldn't think who it was. It was the housemaid who let you in, and she did not know you."

"I only got back this afternoon. I should not have come so late, but I wanted particularly to see you."

"I was putting the boys to bed," said Lady Malleson, accounting with a smile for her apron. "The little darlings splash about so."

"How the boys must hate me for taking you away."

"Oh no; do sit down. Barton will see that their feet are warm. I can thoroughly trust them to her. She is such a comfort."

"Yes," said Felix absently. Then abruptly, "When did Miss Fullarton go?"

"Indeed, I don't know," said the widow, clasping her hands, and growing eager at once. "I thought you would be sure to know. It seems so strange to go like that, without a word."

"Then you did not know——"

"Nothing at all. And I think it almost—unfeeling. I liked Di so much, and I thought I had at last found a friend," she sighed plaintively.

"Women are inexplicable," said Felix, with a short laugh. "Miss Fullarton found England unendurable, I suppose, and has fled to the north."

"Do you think they have gone there?"

"Why not? We all know Miss Bell's virtuous love of her country."

"Nurse met Di; she had taken the boys to Kensington Gardens, to the flowery walk, you know, where it is so safe——"

"Yes," said Felix, with smothered impatience.

"And Di stopped to speak to them. She was so fond of them, especially of little Ralph."

"I am sure of it. Did she send any message?"

"Only that she was going away, and would not have time to come and say good-bye. I think I could have found time; I think I could

have made some little sacrifice to friendship," she said, gently insinuating herself. Then, seeing he was not listening, she added, "Nurse thought her looking ill."

"Ill?" He roused himself. "Then that is why they have gone off so suddenly." He felt full of remorse for his hard thoughts. Why had he judged her so harshly? She was ill; and she had been whisked away by Miss Bell, without a moment to give to her friends.

"She might have spared five minutes, I think."

"She has treated none of us any better," said Felix, able to smile now. "I called on Mrs. Henshaw this afternoon, and she had seen nothing of her either."

"Miss Fullarton is so decided. I never could be energetic—like that; but, of course, if she thought Di looking ill——"

"I am going up there to-night. I'll let you know how she is. And she will write to you herself, of course."

"Going there!—to Scotland, to-night?" Lady Malleson rose in her surprise. Felix was standing, too, as if impatient to be off on the spot.

"Yes," he said, smiling. "Can't you guess why?"

"Oh, not Miss Fullarton!"

"Miss Fullarton!" He stared, and then

burst out laughing, as he had not laughed for the last six hours. "Have I kept my secret so well as that? I didn't know I was so clever!"

It was never his way to hide anything, and he had had nobody to confide in since he relieved Ralph of his presence. It all came pouring out, his hopes and fears, his disappointment.

The widow listened perplexed, then gradually interested, and finally enthusiastic. She had had other views and secretly cherished schemes; but where is the woman who fails to take pleasure in a romantic attachment? It had never been a difficult matter to mould the thoughts of this gentle lady into any desired pattern, as the late baronet very well knew, and Felix, without trying at all, presently discovered that he had a new ally and warm supporter.

She insisted that he would stay and dine, and ordered up the claret that Ralph had instructed her was to be kept for state occasions.

"I do so hope you will succeed," she said again and again, as they sat over dessert.

"I venture to hope, at least," he answered modestly.

"She will listen; I am sure she will listen," she cried, clasping her hands. It seemed to her as if no one could resist this handsome,

kind young man, whom already she felt to be an old friend. Oh, fickle woman! Where now had vanished those touching imaginations of Ralph in his lonely and untidy bachelor quarters? Ralph, who had given up so much for others and was no longer to be compensated with the best!

Thus consoled with creature comforts, and sustained with fervent good wishes, Felix went off comfortably in a first-class carriage to the north, confident that his virtue and his patience were about to be rewarded at last.

All this time the world was showing a dismal enough face to Philippa and her mother. Philippa passed much of her time with the Smiths, spending a little fortune on cabs to take her to and from that hospitable mansion, where she was received with flattering cordiality.

Perhaps she wished to avoid the unwelcome attentions of Mr. Ferryman, who still haunted Brompton, full of determination, and unaware of Felix Chester's presence in England. Perhaps, as she was a young lady of courage, and no longer afraid of this ferocious admirer, she only wished to guard against too frequent opportunities of talk with her mother.

Yet at this time Mrs. Henshaw showed no inclination to be confidential. One day she said carelessly—

"Mr. Chester called here this afternoon, when you were out."

"I saw his card," said Philippa, calmly.

"He was very pleasant, though a little dull, I thought. It is a pity you were not at home. An old woman is poor company, as I told him."

"Did he—did he say anything about Miss Fullarton?"

"He said he understood she had left London. It was news to me. I suppose they have gone to Scotland."

"They have not gone to Scotland."

"He talked of running up to the north for a day or two," she continued, showing no curiosity as to Miss Fullarton's movements. She was, indeed, intent upon her knitting, and her talk was subordinated to the necessity of counting the stitches. She was working warm garments for the poor, which is one way of crying quits with conscience. "He is going to make arrangements about the shootings, I suppose. He says he may have to come back to London soon. I asked him to come and see us when he returns; it's so lonely for a young man in London, at the end of the season."

"Why did you ask him?" said Philippa bitterly. "He didn't show any eagerness to come before."

"He's an old friend," said Mrs. Henshaw, in

that tone of reproof she sometimes used when Philippa showed signs of rebellion; "and if there is one thing I dislike and despise more than another, it is fickleness. You know that proverb about being faithful to old friends—and I do hope you will be polite; you are sometimes so brusque."

"Oh, I will be polite." Philippa laughed, but not pleasantly. She longed to ask, "What did you say to him? and why did Di go abroad?" She had a growing suspicion that her mother knew, and could have told her if she chose; but though she opened her lips, the words did not come. The moment passed unused, and the impulse to face the truth did not again visit her.

"How soon can we go away?" she asked, lingering at the door.

"Very soon now."

"I thought you were waiting to let the house."

"That need not stand in the way. I am ready to sacrifice anything to please you. You see, I *do* consider your wishes——"

"My wishes——" Philippa drew a long breath. "Have we money? That is the chief question, it seems to me."

"We have money enough."

"I am glad to hear it," said Philippa signifi-

cantly. "I never remember when we had enough."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Henshaw smoothly, "you know I never trouble you about such questions. You have my sensitive shrinking from all these stupid details. It is enough that one of us should be plagued. I want you to enjoy yourself; I want you to be happy. You may get a new dress, if you like; we can afford it."

"A new dress!" said Philippa, with an odd smile. "I don't think that would add to my happiness, thank you, mamma."

"If you are going out, be sure to take a cab," her mother called after her amiably. "It is too hot for you to walk."

Mrs. Henshaw was at this time full of a pleasant gentleness. She was very kind to Philippa, and treated her as an indulged child, out of whose path in life all difficulties were to be swept. That was perhaps the reason why she said nothing of an important communication that had reached her from Madrid, and that threw her into a delighted flutter hard to hide.

She did not tell herself that her plans had succeeded. She said instead that she was now, at last, getting her due. Her quarrel with existence was made up. When she heard an impatient ring at the bell, and a quick, familiar

step on the stair, she told herself that this, too, was part of her "reward." The only drawback to all this pleasantness was the uncertainty of Philippa's moods; there was no telling how she might take the news, which her mother prudently resolved to keep to herself. She had lost her gay good-humour, and was silent and restless.

The excitement of driving about in cabs in order to circumvent Mr. Ferryman had gone off; and even the homage of the Smiths failed to satisfy her. She looked darkly sometimes at her handsome, smiling mother, and refused to be consoled with new bonnets or many-buttoned gloves.

She showed no surprise, however, when in a few days Felix reappeared. She did not fail to notice that he was changed: moody and silent, and hardly polite. At the sight of his downcast face, the young lady all at once became very gay and gracious.

"It must be so dull for you after Scotland," she said sweetly.

"Oh yes; it was so lively up there."

"How self-denying of you to tear yourself away! Why aren't you shooting? I thought it was the time to begin and kill things."

"Henderson is going to do my share of the slaughter."

"How generous! And you are going to stay on here? I thought all the fortunate people had left London; the fashionable papers say it is quite empty. Even the Smiths are off to Switzerland. Don't you find it very quiet and stupid without your friends?"

"Philippa, ring for some tea," Mrs. Henshaw interrupted. "I can't do without tea, even in the hottest weather. They say it makes you cooler after."

"Perhaps Mr. Chester would like something else better, mamma," said the young lady graciously, as Felix rose to pull the bell. "What is the national beverage in Scotland?"

Thus sometimes the two young people, who were such old friends, sparred and bandied small sarcasms; sometimes the young man was inclined to be melancholy and moody, and sometimes the young woman relented and was kind.

For Felix began to haunt the Brompton house at this time. What else was there left for him to do? Lady Malleson, alarmed by the pale looks of the twins, had fled to Brighton. London was indeed empty; there was no one in it, except the few millions that never go away. Felix stayed on, because he lacked the energy to go elsewhere. His expedition to Scotland had, as we know, been fruitless; and his present opinion of that country was of the

poorest. He had telegraphed frantically to Ralph, and got back in due time an answer that Miss Ouvry was not expected in Madrid, and that her father, too, was absent from the city. By the next post came a letter, saying the same thing over again. It was an eminently sensible letter. Not for the world would Ralph have allowed a hint of his renewed hope to peep out; but if she did not care for Felix was there not a chance for him?

"My dear boy," he wrote, "don't you see, she means you to take it for her answer?" Ralph paused as he penned the words to smile at the naïveté of the act. He never dreamed that she had hidden herself for quite other reasons than disinclination to pain her lover. "You thought she was putting some constraint on herself, but she is as true as the day. She has gone to save you the pain of a second disappointment. Haven't I known her since she was a baby? Of course I know it's hard on you, but the best thing you can do is to forget her, if you can. You are in luck to be out of this. It's as dull as ditch-water, and as hot as the inferno. St. John has been appointed to Vienna; there are some of us who won't go into mourning. The lady is in Paris, holding subtle consultations with Worth for the electrifying of the Viennese, etc., etc.

"P.S.—When you come to think over it, you will see that mine is the common-sense view of the affair. Of course I'm awfully sorry for you all the same."

"Confound his common-sense!" said Felix, tearing this epistle into little bits. Ralph's words confirmed his own doubts and fears, and yet he almost hated him for writing them. He was a very unhappy young man at this time. He hung about London, though it was deserted by all his friends. He avoided the men—condemned to remain in town—whom he used to nod to at the club, and drank the best wine with the air of a martyr. He was a perfect kill-joy at any place of amusement where he showed face, taking his pleasure with more than British sadness.

He had fallen into a way of dropping in to the Brompton house at all hours. Mrs. Henshaw was kind to him, and made much of him, asking no questions. Not all Ned Henderson's glowing accounts of the bags that were being made on the northern moors could induce him to revisit Kylmure. He drifted on from day to day, hardly caring what became of him. Sometimes pride and anger were uppermost, and he told himself he would cease to think of her, and never try to see her more. The next moment he was crying out that he could not

live without her, and would find her if he searched the whole world through.

It may easily be seen that this was hardly the pleasantest of guests to lounge long afternoons in a lady's drawing-room, but Mrs. Henshaw made no complaint.

"Poor young man! it's so dull for him," she would say. "We must sacrifice ourselves a little to make it cheerful for him."

So she renounced her afternoon nap, and talked pleasantly to him while she knitted, ignoring his silence or his grumpy replies.

He was not quite insensible to so much kindness, and the habit grew on him to go to her for distraction, for consolation. Had his affections been less wholly engaged, there would have been danger for him in this renewed intimacy, for it is the veriest commonplace that a heart is never so easily caught as at the rebound. Philippa and he quarrelled and disputed more than ever, it is true, but those who are learned in such matters do not consider that an unhopeful sign, and when she choose to be gracious it was difficult to resist her.

One hot evening, when he went as usual after dinner, he heard her singing. The windows were wide open, and the sounds came floating out clearly to the dull street. She had a nice little voice, which culture had made the most of.

"Don't stop," he said, as he entered the drawing-room; "go on."

He went and stood behind her. It was a German song she sang; something about a deserter who was shot in presence of his betrothed. Felix paid little heed to the words, but there was a hint in the music of restrained pathos that touched him. He had been angry and hard all day, and now suddenly the flood-gates were set open.

"If I only knew where she had gone!" he said passionately, forgetting that he spoke aloud.

Philippa's hands paused on the keys, her voice faltered. Was she going to speak?

Before the words could come there was a little scream from the other side of the room.

"Oh, my beautiful Murano cup!" cried Mrs. Henshaw. "How could I be so careless! I must have knocked it over with my elbow."

"It is past mending," said Felix, who had gone to her, picking up the opalescent fragments.

"And it was made especially for me. I shall never forgive myself for my clumsiness." Her hands were trembling, her looks anxious.

By the time he had sufficiently condoled with her, everybody had seemingly forgotten his involuntary exclamation.

Philippa had taken no notice of the accident. She had finished her song, but she was playing a sprightly air with a touch of defiance in it. She looked up at him presently, when he came back to her side, with a strange mocking expression on her face.

"We are going away, too," she said.

"Going away!" he echoed, thinking suddenly how lonely he should be.

"Yes; why not? Why should we not go as well as others? Is England so delightful?"

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"To Italy. Como, perhaps, then Venice and Rome."

"To Italy!" He gave an odd laugh. "Of course! Why did I not think of it? One can breathe there after this stiff, cold England; one can forget," he added under his breath. He seemed all at once to be in wildly gay spirits. "If I should turn up there, too, you won't forbid me, will you?" he cried. "You will give me a welcome?"

CHAPTER XII.

"But thou would'st not think how ill all's here,
About my heart: but it is no matter."

THREE or four times every day Bell took occasion to remark that her plan had succeeded admirably, and that, in fact, since Di was enjoying herself so much, there was the less need to regret Kylmure.

Madame Lavoisier, like a wise woman, listened and forebore to contradict her; and when Miss Bell continued, with the voice of conviction—

"She's getting over it nicely. I told you she never cared for him"—she only smiled, taking care that her amusement should not be visible.

It will be seen that nothing was ever said of Mr. Ouvry, whom Nemesis had overtaken. Was Di supposed to have "got over" that too? At least the subject was never touched on between the cousins. Since that night when Di had told out all her trouble, no word had passed her

lips; and to a person who never indulged in idle imaginations, it might well seem that the matter was buried for ever.

Di made no great effort to enjoy herself, and yet she could not help liking the unconventional, out-of-the-world little Bad. Fate had dealt her a stunning blow, but she was half unconscious yet of the pain. It was, besides, never her way to make a moan over anything, and she neither brooded nor moped nor fell into slovenly habits. She dressed herself in her pretty, fresh costumes with some satisfaction in their prettiness, and did justice to the fare at the *table d'hôte.* She looked about her with curious eyes, and found much to astonish her in the long-haired students, whom their Alma Mater had let loose upon the world. What a noble enjoyment they had of life, these young braves; what lusty choruses they shouted, and what oceans of beer flowed in their valhalla under the lindens! Was it possible for a young English maiden to keep from laughing, too, as she listened from her high upper window?

When they sailed upon the broad bosom of the Rhine, she had eyes for everything that the tourist is conjured not to miss, and for much besides that is not printed in the guide-books. She listened to all the legends which madame told almost apologetically in the softest voices;

for are they not, every one of them, tales of woe-begone and unhappy lovers, whom fate persecutes relentlessly? Di listened with flattering attention; but when just after the tragic history of Knight Roland and his lady she was seen to be laughing covertly at the spectacle of a newly-wedded pair, seated hand-in-hand, their heads bent over the same Baedeker, how was any one to suppose that she was not heart-whole?

Bell was pondering over this view of the matter with a great deal of satisfaction in her own room one morning, when the vintage was at hand, and the gleaners were about to strip the terraced hills. It was tiresome, of course, to be kept out of Scotland, and to think of the Henderson girls having undisputed sway over the moors. But by next year Mr. Chester would have married that flippant girl, with the pink and white complexion men thought so much of, and——

At that moment Di walked into the room, disturbing these reflections. She was but half dressed, and her hair was flying.

"Never mind," she said; "lend me a brush and some hair-pins. Do you know, Bell, the postman has come?"

"Has he? Well, I have no accounts. If you want to travel in peace, always pay your

bills before you start. And I don't expect any letters."

"But I have been expecting one, and it has come."

Here was a disagreeable shock to begin the day with.

"Well?" said Bell, not turning round from the looking-glass, where she was finishing her toilet.

"It's from the father."

"Well?" said Bell again dryly, when Di paused.

"He has got home, and he asks me when I am coming back to him."

Bell dropped her hands now, and turned round.

"Of course that's very painful for you, but you had better tell him the truth at once; it's the best way. If you would like me to write——"

"Oh no. Why should you write? He says the Ponsonbys are going to start from Paris on the 10th, and that I could come with them. There is plenty of time to catch them, you see; and I have only to say I will join them."

"Do you mean to say you are going back?" said Bell, startled for once out of her calm.

"Of course!" Di answered, astonished in her turn. "Did you think I was going to stay here always?"

"Always?—No." Miss Bell's tone was pettish. "Don't be silly."

"Then tell me what to say," said Di, unable to resist a smile. "If I am not to spend my life here, why shouldn't I go home?"

"I understood you had agreed to share my home—in London or Scotland, or wherever it might be. I would live anywhere you like. There is the money; I don't care where I go."

"But never to go home!" Di held the brush suspended in her extreme surprise.

"I can't think how you can care to go back to Madrid."

Bell turned away sharply. She was vexed and disappointed. She had made such noble plans, and here they were all blown away at a breath. She had credited Di with a lofty scorn of wrong-doing, and here she was proposing almost joyfully to go back to a father whom society had disowned. It was very disheartening.

"I should have thought you would never want to return," she said, hardly caring to veil her meaning. It was not a time to mince one's speech.

"I understand you." Di's cheeks burned hot, but she lifted her head with a proud movement. "But you forget—he is my father."

"There is a time when duty should cease to be a first consideration."

Di smiled.

"Duty?" she said. "I think I have forgotten mine now in staying so long away from him."

"I am older than you——" Bell began coldly, but Di stopped her with a gesture of rare petulance.

"What has age to do with it?" she said. "I can't see how that alters anything. He is my father. I love him."

Bell deigned no direct answer. She could hardly say, "You ought not to love your father"—that would be to rush right in the face of a direct commandment—but in her heart she felt that Di was weak and almost immoral in her laxity.

"I think we had better go down to breakfast," she said, putting the last neat touches to her dress. "There is no use continuing a discussion like this."

"No. Wait a minute." Di flew after her. "Bell, you have been ever so good to me, but you can't suppose, surely, that anything would make me forsake the padre? If you only knew! But your father died when you were a baby: and though madame is nice, she is not like a mother. So how can you know?"

"We'll talk of it another time." Miss Fullarton saw a figure appearing at the other end of the corridor, and she hated to be caressed in public. "You've ruffled my collar," she said. "If you will go down, I'll put it straight and follow you."

"I've ruffled her temper, *too*," thought poor Di, as she went away alone. How could she help it? It was preposterous to think that she was to remain for ever an exile, because—— She did not let herself dwell upon the "because;" she always put it away from her quickly. Love rose up, and criticism remained dormant. All the stronger impulses of her nature rushed towards the channels of tenderness and affection. The padre needed her, that was enough. And she had left him so long! She began to feel a great remorse for those weeks of silence to which she had consented. Since that horrible day when the world about her grew dark, she had not written to him or to Ralph. She had filled up her life with other things, and tried to put them out of it.

She was thinking of these things as she stood at the window of the salon, waiting for her cousin, who was grappling with a rebellious mood upstairs. She looked so grave, that a good German Frau, busy with some sad-coloured

knitting, began to think of consoling recipes, and determined to recommend herb-tea as a cure for every ill under the sun.

The bower under the lindens, at which Di was staring so absently, was empty now. The braves had departed, to pledge a brimming cup elsewhere, and she, too, was going.

On a sudden *heimweh* (that fine, untranslatable word) had seized her, and a longing, not to be denied, for the old familiar ways.

The old ways—and yet never again the same. She remembered Ralph's words as they sat near the little palace in the Florida—his law of life —"Dass wir entsagen müssen." How hard a doctrine that had seemed to be then, and now—was it not the law of her life too?

The good Frau was all the time wondering whether it was Herr Rittmeister Wendt or Herr Leutnant von Gersdorf, who had made so deep an impression on the flexible heart of the pretty Engländerinn.

"The Herr Leutnant is a beautiful man, nicht?" she said, advancing to the window with crafty overtures.

"Is he?" said Di absently, a little surprised, and fetching back her mind with difficulty to the point. "I don't think I know him."

"You sat next him at supper," said the lady reproachfully.

"Oh, that one!" she answered indifferently. "I thought him a little like a doll, so neat and small and nicely finished.

"He is much admired," said the lady, rather offended and very unbelieving. Had she not, with her own eyes, seen the gallant soldier talking to the English miss, who must have felt the honour in spite of her indifference?

"I don't understand him very well," said Di hastily. She saw her cousin coming, and went forward to meet her, anxious only to be reconciled.

It is not to be supposed that Bell gave up the battle so easily. She returned to the charge with undaunted vigour.

"I want you to consider it seriously," she said. "I don't want you to forsake your father. You might go to see him, or we might have him here" (this was a great stretch of magnanimity); "but you must see that there would be great advantages in having your home in England. I know how it will be if you go back there now; you will get yourself into trouble."

She spoke vaguely, but she meant, "That young man will come dancing round you again, and you will make a mess of both your lives; for of course you can never marry him."

To all this Di opposed silence chiefly; but she wrote her letter, and packed her trunk.

Bell was very valiant. She thought of new arguments in bed, and rose fresh to the attack in the morning. She battled bravely throughout the day, and remained unconquered in the evening. It was hard for this calm and sensible young person to find all her excellent arrangements set aside. She was so sure she could make a noble and beautiful thing out of Di's life, if she would only surrender it into her hands; but Di refused, and chose to take her fate into her own keeping.

Madame took no part at all in these discussions. She bided her time, and exchanged recipes and knitting-patterns with the German lady. She was, to all appearance, serenely unconscious of the disputes that lengthened Miss Bell's upper lip, and made Di look so troubled.

But it was a losing battle Miss Bell fought, and at last she had the grace to recognize that she was defeated.

Her final surrender was characteristic.

"Di wishes to go home," she said one day, appearing suddenly at her friend's side.

Madame had been drinking her morning potion of the nauseous water that brought celebrity to the little Bad, and she set down her tumbler before elevating her eyebrows to the proper degree of surprise.

"To go home?" she echoed.

"Yes, to her father. He is her father; and of course she must do as he wishes."

"It will be very hot there." Madame was too wise to repeat the "of course," or otherwise to acquiesce.

"I have said all I can," Bell remarked briefly.

"You don't approve?" madame asked tentatively.

"No; but I can't hinder her. I don't want to be her jailer."

She was about to move away, but she turned abruptly and looked darkly at her companion.

"We must go with her to Paris," she said. "I think those Ponsonby people might have come here; but since they can't, or won't, I suppose we must go."

"One cannot allow a young girl to travel alone. No; it would not be right." Madame shook her head, as if she were examining the question for the first time, and had not written a week before to prepare the mind of M. Adolphe for their appearance.

"So you will get your wish at last, you silly woman," said Bell, allowing a smile to unbend her lips.

"And you will get some new dresses, my dear. If it were not that anything is good enough for the Germans, I should have hesitated to go about with you."

Thus madame was made happy at last, and Di was whirled away to the south, where love was waiting her, and the old familiar life, precious still, even if robbed of some of its early glory.

"You can always come back, you know," said Bell, who loved to be magnanimous. "I shall be ready for you at any time; it will make no difference at all to me. I want you to remember this, in case you should change your mind. My plans are not likely to alter," she said firmly, having indeed a very fixed theory of the way in which she should portion out her days.

"Thank you. You have been very good to me," said Di gratefully.

She was leaning out of the carriage, where the Ponsonbys were already seated, and her heart warmed to the prim, sedate cousin whom she had disappointed.

It was a final good-bye, because, though she did not say it, she knew she should not change her mind.

As she spoke, she caught a glimpse of a well-waxed moustache and a pair of twinkling patent boots, and it did not need the radiant smile on madame's face to enlighten her as to the owner of these possessions. She smiled back in sympathy; and so these familiar faces

passed away, and she sat down, resigning herself to Mr. Ponsonby's patronizing care. She never could understand why the fussy little man and his strong-minded wife were so kind, and yet so mysterious; so anxious for her comfort, and yet so solemn over it.

Ralph met her at the station, and when she felt the warm clasp of his hand, she knew that everything had not gone from her. He was the same old Ralph, and he greeted her without anything to show that his heart was thumping at a faster pace than usual.

"How many boxes does it take to hold the wardrobe of a young lady fresh from Paris?" he asked, as he handed her into a cab.

"Just two. I'm not a Mrs. St. John. How was I to get any new clothes, when you wrote so peremptorily for me to come back?"

"We had better stop at the Calle de Montera then, and order some on the spot. How could you have the heart to deprive us of a new toilet!"

"So you only wanted to see my new dresses! Do you know you have never once said you are glad to see me." She looked at him reproachfully as they set out.

"I was afraid you might snub me. Maidens fresh from making the grand tour don't permit such liberties."

"Other people will be glad to see me," she said with dignity; and then she laughed. "Tell me about everybody."

"Miss Piper has been meditating a journey to England; she says one ought to travel when one is young. She wishes to hold out a forgiving hand to the Piper who has tarnished the family honour by entering the silk-trade. I only dissuaded her by telling her you were coming."

"Then the Piper cousin has been good to her again?"

"I think not. She did not let out anything of the kind when she proposed to go on her pilgrimage. We had quite a little breeze over the affair; Miss Barbara's wrath was sublime. She hinted darkly at straight-waistcoats and solitary confinement. As a vent to her energy she packed up the plate, and sent it to the embassy with a note that must have made Mr. Berry's hair stand on end."

"As if he weren't bald!" she said; and they both laughed. They were capable of the utmost foolishness in their pleasure in being together again.

"You want me," she said, shaking her head. "You can't get on without me."

"I did my best," said Ralph in a meek voice. "I had both ladies to tea separately. The tea

was of the strongest. If it could be known what diplomacy it took to persuade Miss Piper that it was the correct thing to cheer a bachelor's loneliness, they would have appointed me to Vienna instead of St. John."

"Then the St. Johns have left?"

"They are off, bag and baggage; Von Rosen and Meyers in their train. I met Meyers lingering in the Preciados. He was a spectacle for gods and men to weep at."

"I suppose there are plenty of ladies in Vienna," said Di, with a touch of scorn. She could not trust herself to mention Philippa's name. It seemed to take a weight from her heart to know that Madrid was relieved of the American lady's presence. It was one pang the less, though she had prepared herself to be often wounded, and she was not ungrateful.

All this time Mr. Ouvry had not been mentioned.

"Your father is at home; I offered to meet you," Ralph said, as they drew up at the door. "Shall I come to see you in the evening? Or you will be tired, perhaps."

"Come now, don't leave me," she said, laying her hand for a moment on his.

She did not know why she suddenly wanted him to be with her, not to forsake her; and he, though he would infinitely rather have turned

away, followed her without a word. He could not tell her that for weeks he had never climbed the familiar stair; that from the hour when he had been forced into seeming partisanship with her father he had seen him but once, and that on a business he would fain forget.

Di went up the stair lightly, while he waited, glad of the excuse of the luggage. She never faltered or hesitated, but went straight to her father where he was standing with his back to the light. She threw back her cloak, and put her arms round his neck. She looked at him with her honest eyes full of timid, beseeching love. It was as if she pleaded, "Don't care for me the less because I know." Then she hid her face on his shoulder.

"I've come back to you, padre," she whispered, asking forgiveness for those weeks of silence.

"I thought you would come back," he said a little moved; and then, more lightly, "I couldn't do without my little girl, you know."

When Malleson came in, Mr. Ouvry was rolling a cigarette daintily between his long, gentlemanly fingers; and Di had taken off her hat, and was seated in her little chair by the window.

"I feel as if I had never been away," she said, but she smothered a sigh.

The two men nodded to each other.

"You forgot your purse," said Ralph, standing behind her and dropping it lightly into her lap.

"Ah, you want our good Ralph to look after you," said Mr. Ouvry, finishing his work with a last neat and dexterous movement. "And now you are hungry, aren't you, and want some breakfast? Concha is preparing a feast for you, but I don't recommend you to wait for that."

"Oh, how shameful to forget good old Concha!" Di sprang up. "I must go to her."

Ralph opened the door for her, and hesitated there a moment.

"You'll stay and have some breakfast?" The older man did not look at the younger as he gave the invitation; he was intent on lighting his cigar—a delicate operation.

Ralph nodded. He did not trust himself to speak.

And thus they drifted back into the old ways, and Malleson found himself talking as he had talked before, hiding behind a veil of trivial words the scorn and dislike it was not good to show—the contempt to which, for Di's sake, he had forbidden speech.

After this he came as usual, dropping in when his work was done to chat with her or

to take her out. It was wonderfully like old times externally—the times before those unwelcome English visitors had come to disturb their peace. Mr. Ouvry absented himself, and Di preferred to sit at home with her work. Ralph could less often persuade her to walk in the Prado than before, but he knew that he should find her in her corner ready to welcome him. Sometimes she entertained him with accounts of her travels. She spoke of Miss Bell very freely, and gave him a neat little vignette of Madame Lavoisier; even M. Adolphe—seen but once—served to point a tale. But in all these talks no allusion was made to Felix. That young man had disappeared from their horizon, and his friends had no tidings of him; his coming and his going might have been an idle dream, so little did he affect their talk. And so Ralph tried to persuade himself that the old times had come back indeed.

Yet the thought of his cousin haunted him, his name hovered persistently on his lips, but he could not pronounce it. He wanted to bring it in easily and naturally, and all the sentences he framed seemed artificial. He knew he should stammer and hesitate and break down awkwardly, not looking at her, and yet it was her face above all things he wanted to read.

Yet this unnatural silence could not last between two who were such old and such fast friends. Di had something to say, and one night a chance word of his helped her to say it.

They were chatting of things indifferent, but by-and-by there fell one of those pauses of silence while each dwelt on his own thoughts. When it had lasted a little longer than usual, he said to her, suddenly speaking out what was in his heart—

"Why did you not write to me all these weeks?"

She looked at him, startled; and then she turned to the window. Her profile was towards him, and he could see the sudden quivering of her lips.

"I was thinking of sad things." She answered him as she had answered Philippa.

He asked no more, but his thoughts were bitter within him.

She was the first to speak again.

"Ralph," she said, "you remember that Mr. King, whose address you gave me? You said I was to go to him if—if, I was in any trouble."

"I remember."

"He is dead. I never saw him; but he has left me his money, as I told you in my letter."

"It was a sensible thing to do," he said, as she paused again.

"It must have been for love of mamma. I've been thinking what she would like me best to do with it."

"Yes," he forced himself to say.

But she could not go on. She rose and came to him where he leaned against the mantelpiece.

"Oh, Ralph, you understand," she said incoherently, brokenly. "She told me—she said you knew. You will take this money of mine and pay her for me? You will set us free."

For a moment he could not speak. The blood was leaping in indignant throbs through his veins. They had told her, then, they had been base enough to tell her, and this was why she had fled. Oh, what a fool he had been—what a conceited, miserable fool! He did not dare to follow his thoughts further. She was waiting, appealing to him, and her tears were falling on his hand.

"It is all paid," he said gently, "every farthing of it."

CHAPTER XIII.

"What say you to a letter from your friend?
Of much good news?"

THE winter went by, as even the slowest winter will. Everybody said it was a very dull season, and there were some who lamented the absence of Mrs. St. John. Miss Laura Lascelles, whose deputy she had been, was much more strict, and her dances were sedate affairs. "She might almost have passed for an Englishwoman," said the grumblers.

Major Gibbs, disgusted with the political weather—electrical as before a storm—went off to the German baths to nurse his gout. Thus, as one enemy after another disappeared, people began to forget the hints and rumours and dark sayings that had linked themselves with Mr. Ouvry's name; and that gentleman slipped easily into the old ways, and was, as before, a pillar in the café, and a patron of polite literature in the Athenæum.

Some the report had never reached at all, and others hardly spent a thought on it, or were content with Malleson's curt assurance that the past had been cancelled. After all, the world is very tolerant if you do not defy her to her face. This man had lived among them, bland and blameless, for the best part of a lifetime, and if he were other than he seemed, that was his own affair. It was not too charitable, this little colony of a Saxon race, but it was half pagan in its indifference, in its willingness to take the whited sepulchre for what it professed to be, not curious to pry within. It is with the externals society deals; if these are satisfactory, who cares for the rest? The phenomenon of a man "with a past" was not so uncommon. There were not a few Englishmen in the two Castiles who never cared to cross the Pyrenean snows.

Thus rumour forgot him, and went to hint away some one else's reputation, as was but just, and all the good things of life were restored to him. Di's legacy—no such tremendous fortune—was spent lavishly on him. You would have thought, to see the pains she took, that those short weeks of silence were never to be atoned for.

Once only Felix Chester's name was mentioned.

"Where is that young man?" her father asked.

"I don't know, padre."

She was dusting her little knickknacks, and she paused a minute to give the answer. She never thought of evading the question, or pretending to misunderstand it.

"You sent him away?"

"Yes."

"You must marry some day, my child. You must not think of me."

She threw down her duster at that and came to him.

"Why should I marry? It is best not to think of these things. It is best as it is—just you and me together."

"But that won't last. You must do without the padre some day. He is growing old."

"You know it is forbidden to talk like that." She laid her hand on his lips.

"But one can't forbid the grey hairs."

"You shall dye them," she smiled. "I'll make you have purple hair like Major Gibbs, and I'll wear a flaxen front, with little corkscrew curls, like Miss Piper, and we'll always be young."

But though she laughed, did she for an instant forget the lover whom she had sent

away? Was there an hour of the day when she did not think of him?

Entire silence had fallen between them. She had fled, and he had been content to let her go. Sometimes she wondered what the message was that Ralph had sent her, but she never asked him. She tried conscientiously to think of Felix dancing in stately English ball-rooms with Philippa, and consoling himself with her bright glances; but that was, after all, dismal thinking. It was better to jump up and busy herself with some homely bit of work, such as the washing of the father's pet morsels of china, or the making of a pudding for his dinner.

Sometimes she wandered to the gallery, where the saints and martyrs, the rapt madonnas, live in a hushed, perpetual calm. When she looked at their pictured peace, she felt that love is not everything, that life has other ends. Perhaps Ralph was right. Duty might be more beautiful than happiness, though it wore so unlovely a face. It might be that she was too selfish, too faint-hearted to have found out its charms. She wondered if there was not some helpful work in which she might take a modest share; some of that cheering of the poor and caring for the sick, to which ardent women have in all ages consecrated their lives. What would Miss Barbara have said, if she had guessed that

Di sometimes envied the meek-faced sisters, who stole in and out of the great hospital with modest foot, and looked at her with sidelong glances as she climbed the hill, half ashamed of her idle youth and health and the life in her that would make her step elastic, in spite of her heart, which was sometimes heavy.

She went oftener than before to the great light room where Mrs. Gordon spent her days. The two ladies, who lived remote from society, shook their heads together over the disappointment of their hopes. It was a perpetual subject of talk. Why had the child come back alone, and where was fickle Prince Alasnam? Was it possible that he meant, after all, to lift that flippant, flirting Philippa to the vacant pedestal; that he could be deceived with the glitter of false diamonds, and pass by the true?

Miss Barbara was for asking the girl bluntly, and for warning her solemnly that men were "deceivers ever," and best left out of a woman's life-plans; but Mrs. Gordon would not hear of it. She, too, had been seduced into a willing allegiance by the smiling frankness of the gay young lover, but, failing him, there was another and a worthier. She had a private consolation which she did not impart.

"Let her alone," she said. "How do we know what she may have wished? Perhaps

the true prince is not so very far off, after all."

One day Di, visiting these ladies, announced, with a mischievous face, that she meant to have a tea-party.

"A tea-party!" said Miss Barbara, who had furnished herself with a new cap, and saw here an occasion to wear it, but who held a little contradiction to be wholesome. "What has put that nonsense into your head? Hadn't you enough of gay doings last year?"

"That only gave me a taste for more," said Di saucily.

But this was not to be borne.

"Is that all you've learned with your jaunting about the world——," she was beginning majestically, but Mrs. Gordon interrupted her serenely.

"Why not have your party here, Di, then I should have the benefit."

"And the silver plate all away!" cried Miss Barbara, shifting her point of attack. "Mary Gordon, you're as heedless as a man!"

"The earthenware teapot might do. It would never be noticed under Di's smart new cosy, and it makes better tea."

"No," said Miss Barbara, with much stateliness; "I'll not be put to shame with any of your earthenware. We can get the plate back

for the day if there's a need be. It's but right Deonys should see the teapot that's to be her own one day. And you can watch me manage it, Di. It's not everybody that can make good tea out of it."

"Then it's a bargain, and I'm to give the invitations," Di answered, with a smile of secret enjoyment.

Thus it was settled, and she went about the subtlest part of her scheme, which was nothing less than the extinction of the Piper and Gordon feud.

She came on the night in question, supporting the trembling Miss Piper on her arm. It would task words to tell the persuasions she had used to get her to come at all. The blue satin was not worn on this occasion, but a modest and ancient silk, which could not offend Miss Barbara's prejudices; and the little lady's deportment was meek enough to disarm the most rancorous foe.

Miss Barbara, to do her justice, laid aside open hostilities under her own roof, and did not stint her guest of cream, or water the teapot unduly before filling her cup. Ambassadress Di, seating herself near the tray—furnished with its odd snips of wax-cloth—helped to dispense the sugar, and whispered as she dropped the lumps—

"Miss Piper has a most important matter to consult you about."

"She had better go to some other body," said Miss Barbara, scorning an undertone. "I'm a poor hand at giving advice, especially to folks that never take it."

"But I promise you it will be taken."

"You needn't be so rash with your promises, Deonys; you are not so very ready to be guided as all that comes to."

"Oh, but you must help us. We can't get on at all without you—can we?"

"It would certainly be a great assistance," murmured Miss Piper, apologetic and timid. "An old friend, on whom one could rely—such a delicate commission——"

"If it's anything delicate, as you call it, I'll have nothing to do with it. The Gordons were never good at manœuvring. If there's a wrong to put right, it's a plain word and a blow with them——"

"More often the blow," said Malleson to himself. He stood outside the circle.

"If it's anything like interfering and encouraging young people in underhand ways or silly love nonsense, you'll find others better at that than me." She levelled her rudest shaft at the conspirators.

"It's a commission from Mrs. St. John," said

Di, who knew that diplomatists needed patience. "She wants a whole shopful of things—fans and gloves, and I don't know all what."

"She would have sent to you, but she feared to be intrusive," Miss Piper struck in eagerly. "As for me, she is aware that my time is not valuable."

"She knows very well I wouldn't encourage her to spend her money on such vanities!"

"She means to give the things away, doesn't she? Sugar-plums for the Viennese," said Malleson, lounging up to them. "Come, Miss Barbara, we all know your reputation as a bargainer. The Blue Dahlia lays down his arms the very moment you appear at the door; and as for the Three Roses, he never shows fight at all."

"I would scorn to let myself be cheated as some folks are." She turned on him loftily. "It's you men, with your easy, heedless ways, that spoil the shopkeepers. If they had only women to deal with, they would soon come to reason."

"See what it is to have strength of mind! My tailor charges me a fabulous sum, and when I meekly pay down, regrets he has let me off so cheap."

"That is the way with me, too," said Miss Piper, plucking up a spirit at this similarity of

experience. "And when they tell you the price so courteously, how are you to know it isn't true? It seems so rude to doubt a person's word."

"It's worse to help them to be dishonest"—Miss Barbara spoke severely—"and that's what you do with your soft ways. I wonder you can reconcile it to your consciences."

"It's so difficult," sighed Miss Piper. "And do you really think it is a matter of conscience? I have never considered it in that light."

"It's a matter of getting the things cheap; that's what Mrs. St. John means, if I'm not mistaken," said Malleson, glancing at the list.

"Well, you may let me see the letter. If there's one thing that vexes me more than another, it's to see people wasting their money," said Miss Barbara, giving a grudging permission, whereupon Di rose and walked over to Mrs. Gordon's sofa, and, sitting down at that lady's feet, laughed openly up in her face.

"Di, what a conspirator you have grown!"

"I thought Miss Barbara couldn't resist a passage of arms with the Blue Dahlia," she whispered.

She knew that her mission was ended; the ambassadress was triumphant; the cause was won.

But there was something more in the letter

than mere commissions. There was a postscript which Di had not seen, and which, after the manner of postscripts, contained the whole kernel of news. This Miss Piper, with many mysterious words and covert shakings of the head, proceeded to impart as a sign of the newly-sealed truce.

Malleson, watching this by-play with some amusement, presently found himself taken into their councils. Miss Piper's hand shook, and all her flowers and feathers quivered as she handed him the fluttering sheet.

"I always feared she was imprudent, and perhaps too fond of admiration, though so pretty," she said; "but I confess I am disappointed. I thought he was looking in another quarter." She glanced at Di, and then dropped her eyes as if she had exceeded the bounds of modesty by presuming to think at all on so delicate a matter. "Not that I wanted her to marry," she added in a hurry; "I always implore young people to wait."

"It's a pity you couldn't have got that designing creature to take your advice," said Miss Barbara dryly. "I saw through her from the first. Mark my words, she'll never get married at all, let her be engaged a score of times. Give a girl like that one lover, and she'll hanker after twenty, and end by securing none of them.

Men are dull enough, but they've a glimmering of sense left when it comes to the choosing of a wife."

"Pooh!" said Malleson, to whom all this flutter and fuss seemed very like a storm in a teacup. "You make too much of a bit of mere idle gossip; and if it were true——"

"I sadly fear it is true."

"He knows his own mind best, I suppose," said Malleson impatiently.

"And you would leave the poor lad to his fate!" cried Miss Barbara indignantly. "You would see him hoodwinked, and never lift a finger to help him! If I weren't too old"—she glanced at her mild companion drooping over her teacup—"to go gallivanting by myself about the world, I would set out to-morrow and fetch him back. It's the least any true friend of his could do for him."

"If one could be sure that her heart was not in it," said the more sentimental lady.

Malleson turned away impatient and cross. Even the mental picture of Miss Barbara striding across the continent to the rescue of the recalcitrant youth hardly awoke a smile. He was contemptuous over the whisperings and tattle of drawing-rooms that please the women; but all the while he could not forget the letter that had raised this tempest. One or two other

guests came in, and the room began to fill. When everybody was talking, inspired and cheered by the wild music of the reels and strathspeys which Miss Barbara drew from the jingling piano, he retired to a distant window, and read again the thin sheet which he had not relinquished.

"So I hear that Philippa Henshaw and the campaigner—that's what Mr. St. John calls the mother; he says it's in some book, Thackeray or something—are in Italy! Wash Bean saw them—he met them in Rome; and that young Englishman, Chester, was dancing around them as usual. They say he's caught at last. I always thought it was the little one; but, then, you can flatter a man into anything, and I guess she can do with a fortune. I always thought him quite too stiff myself, but then we Americans are different. . . . Mind you get the fans and things cheap. Worth has nearly ruined me, but the costumes are perfectly lovely. The ladies here have no taste anyway; they are as dowdy as Englishwomen. My new silks are all made with a train, etc., etc."

What had he to do with all this? He crushed the paper in his hand. Was it for him to go and save the moth fluttering round the candle from singeing its wings? If the silly moth mistook the flame of a farthing dip for the sun,

what was that to him? Was he bound with his own hand to destroy the last frail chance to which he clung? He had warned the boy; he had done what he could to save him; but if he would not be saved, what again was that to him? If Felix married this girl, he—well, he would be as happy as most people, as happy as he deserved to be. She was very pretty and perfectly sweet-tempered. Society would envy him and applaud him, and say that he had done excellently. And his higher aspirations, his impulsive desires to play the man and live worthily, would Philippa's smiles foster these?

Ralph pulled himself up suddenly. "It's a lie," he said to himself; "and you know it. You are mean enough to be thinking first of yourself. If you keep silent—you who have some influence over him—and let him drift into this, you think there may be a chance for you. Let him marry and be as wasteful of his life as he likes, so long as there is a chance for you; that is your mean thought, unmasked and stripped." This man dealt hardly with himself, but he loved the truth; he loved it well enough to judge himself by it as well as his neighbour.

He glanced across at Di, who was talking with the English chaplain. The girl's face was serene and sweet. She had found her mission in deeds of kindliness to the poor of the little British

community—no great or elaborate work, but enough to keep her nature whole and sound, unsoured by disappointment. She was at the moment discussing soup and flannel with the clergyman, and laughing with him over some of her little experiences. It might seem as if she had put love far enough away from her—a maiden as fancy-free as any Diana—but Malleson knew better. He had not studied her face all these months to misread it now. Suddenly he remembered the letter he had written in answer to Felix's desperate telegrams, that calm, sensible epistle in which he so wisely accounted for her disappearance. Oh, fool that he had been! and he had thought that there was hope for him—

But a drawing-room is hardly the place to bemoan your fate. Society expects you to behave like a Spartan. You must smile all the same, though the fox is gnawing at your vitals. Somebody came and drew this sulky Mr. Malleson from his corner and made him talk. He found himself laughing presently, and complimenting Miss Barbara on her ancient melodies.

Strike up the music—more reels; more wild and barbaric noises, so that we may all be merry and drown thought!

Di was in bright spirits that night, and entertained him all the way home. She was a bit of a mimic, and rehearsed the affair of the truce for

the benefit of this morose Ralph. It was fine to have accomplished her mission. Henceforward the great feud was a thing of the past, to be referred to in the years that were left as "the time when Miss Barbara and I had our little difference, you know;" or, "the winter when that silly body, Amelia Piper, made such a spectacle of herself." Had she not seen the two heads laid very close together, the two caps nodding at each other over the list of Mrs. St. John's wants; and had she not heard all the details of the subtle scheme for laying siege to the Blue Dahlia next morning? "You see, you couldn't do without me," she said, with saucy triumph.

"It's a memorable achievement," he answered, striving after lightness of tone. "You had better mark it as a red-letter day in your diary: 'Suppression of the Gordon riots.'"

"I don't keep a diary now," she answered, with sudden gravity.

"Since when did you give up that virtuous habit? I must look into this matter. Nineteen, and without a diary to confide in! There must be something seriously amiss."

"One must cease to be foolish some time," she said turning away her head.

"Don't grow too wise before the time, child," —he smiled at her rather sadly—"that will

come soon enough. When did you give up your journal?"

"In England—before I went to Germany."

It was the answer he expected.

"Why?" he continued urgently.

"Because"—she spoke with an effort—"when one has nothing but sad things to write about, when one is not very happy, it is best to be quiet."

"So it has come," he said half to himself. She too has learned her lesson of silence. In face of life's real troubles who cares to be garrulous? "Letts's Scribbling Diary" holds no very deep secrets of the human heart, I take it: the anguish that is bitter to bear is never expressed in well-turned phrases.

His heart ached for her, ached the more that she took her troubles so bravely and with a smiling face.

She pulled him in when he would have left her at the door. She was almost cruel in her kindness.

"Come and see the father," she called to him, flying lightly up the steps and into the sitting-room, but no Mr. Ouvry was there. The lamp burned low, but on the table, seen clearly in the half darkness, was a little patch of white.

"More letters!" she cried. "What a night of news!"

He screwed up the lamp, and she opened the first envelope.

"It's from Madame Lavoisier," she said. "Wait, Ralph, and I'll read it to you."

Madame's letters always amused her. They were full of sprightly details and pictures of life in the gayest capital in the world. M. Adolphe, of whom she had heard so much, figured largely in them. His name was not less frequent in this, but the tone was dismal throughout.

"Figure to yourself my despair," wrote madame. "Just when I hoped that our dear Bell was becoming human, that she possessed a heart open to tenderness, there arrives a whole Scotch family—father, mother, brother, sister. Excellent people, no doubt, but with what an accent, what an absence of grace! We are inseparable; we breakfast together *en famille*, we dine, we sup, we go to see the sights. I am inconsolable, and my poor Adolphe despairs. I tremble for him; I quiver every time the bell rings. He is capable of throwing himself into the Seine. To-morrow we shall be ordered back to Scotland. I cry when I am alone over the destruction of all my hopes."

Heartless Miss Di burst into an inextinguishable laughter over this epistle.

"You don't think of M. Adolphe tearing his hair as he hovers on the brink," said Malleson, reproachfully.

"He won't drown himself; he'll wait till the water is warmer, and by that time he will have consoled himself with a French girl. That's the way, isn't it?" she said saucily.

As she replaced the sheet, a second little note fluttered out of the envelope.

"Now for Bell's view of the case," she said.

Miss Bell's sentiments were characteristic. She went straight to the point. No graceful drapery of description, no reflection here.

"I ought to tell you that I have felt for some time that you were right to go back to your father. I have seen something of family life lately, and I can enter more into your feelings now. After all, one's own people should come first. The Hendersons joined us in this hotel last week, and we have been much together; Sarah Henderson is so sensible, and she can do almost anything. Ned, that is her brother, is *much improved;* it is beautiful to see his behaviour to his mother. I wish you had known the Hendersons; you would have understood what good grounds I have for appreciating Scotch character. The French are a sadly light-minded nation; even madame, who is Scotch by birth, has caught something of their frivolous manner. Mr. Henderson, who knows her well, thinks her *much altered.* He considers her rather a dangerous person, and wishes Sarah to be as little with her as possible. I tell him it is *all*

manner; but it is a pity she gives one a wrong impression. Ned Henderson has just come to ask me to go with him and Sarah to the Louvre, so I must close this letter."

"So Miss Bell has met her fate," said Malleson, with a laugh. "Oh, you women, what mischief you work in the world!"

Di did not laugh this time. She let the note drop carelessly from her fingers. She was thinking—"that is the Ned Henderson Mr. Chester used to talk about, who went shooting with him in the north."

Malleson had picked up his hat and was saying good-bye, and something about perhaps not seeing her again for a little time—a sudden journey had called him off at a moment's notice. He spoke rather incoherently; he did not look at her. She gave him her hand mechanically, hardly listening to him.

"A journey?" she said. "Oh, come back soon."

He stooped and kissed her hand.

"For good luck," he said, in an odd voice, going off at a great pace.

She looked after him absently. Her mind was full of one thought.

"Bell will see this friend of his every day, and they will talk about him; and I am not there to hear them."

CHAPTER XIV.

"What news on the Rialto?
Who is he comes here?"

It was in Venice that he found them at last—Venice which he had prayed never more to see. His thoughts were bitter within him as he tossed his portmanteau into a gondola, and with a swift stroke or two was carried out upon the shining path. Venice, queen of the seas, was not less fair than when he had seen her last in his hot youth. He had thought her cruel then, because she smiled upon his gloom; he was older now, and he did not expect Mother Nature to work miracles—to mourn and lament with you and to laugh at the same instant because it pleases me to be glad. Was Venice to blame, because his second coming was destined to be as joyless as his first? Here, long ago, he had fought his battle, and had retired wounded and, as he supposed, at an end of all fighting for the rest of a maimed and ignoble life.

"History repeats itself," he exclaimed, and he laughed aloud rather bitterly. The gondolier, bending to his task, glanced at him, but not in wonder. Nothing that these strange English did could surprise him. He knew them all and their ways. It was his experience, often repeated, that they preserved a solemn gloom when everybody else was grinning, and only relaxed when not a hint of pleasantry was in the air. They were exclusive even in their smiles, these cold, proud Britons.

All unconscious of the character that was being given him, Malleson landed at his hotel and proceeded to order dinner. He was past the age when bitter feelings take away the appetite. He ate and drank and noticed all the little changes in the arrangements and the furniture that had taken place since last he had stayed in the same house. From the window of his room he looked upon a dark and dismal reach of greenish water, where the afternoon shadows fell earliest; these sluggish side-paths have little that is picturesque about them. He remembered that he was leaning on this balcony, or its fellow, one night in that time long ago; he was fresh from Oxford, full of dreams and enthusiasms, and the meanest gondola laden with market produce gliding slowly over the sombre strip of water was a wonder to him.

Then Roderick burst in with a wild air and a white terrified face; and good-bye from that moment to dreams and visions.

Well, it was folly to dwell on these things; it was treason to the past and to poor old Rod, whose grave was green. We are unfaithful enough, Heaven knows, to those who still journey with us, but we have, most of us, this grace of loyalty to the dead. It was better to dress and go out, and to pluck up a heart for the last struggle.

He chose the hour when everybody was sure to be abroad, to see and be seen in the great square, where life marches evenly to music.

Spring had already come to this sea-city, and the mild glory of the sunset touched the placid waters with a faint red flush. Far off on the distant lagoons water and sky met, and strange new lands and seas, unmapped by any geographer, sprang into sudden existence. San Giorgio, set against that daffodil and rose, was surely never raised by human hands—it was a wonder, a dream; the slender shaft of the campanile looked as if a breath would sway it.

Venice was thinking of quite other things as it sauntered and beat time to the band. It loves its frivolity; it is only the English papas and mammas with many fair-haired daughters who are not frivolous. These stared up at the great

horses, trying inwardly to think St. Mark as beautiful as all persons of good taste pronounce it to be. The young people cared more, perhaps, for the pigeons, or for the puppets who strike the hours with unwearied spirit; most of all, of course, for the shops.

The café Florian was driving a brisk trade, and at all the little tables people were sipping ices; the piazza was black with moving figures, careless of the rare golden light. Malleson made his way slowly through the throng, gay as people only are in Venice. All at once he saw Philippa. She, too, was looking up at the proud, prancing horses, but her eyes were absent and vague in their glance. He stopped and examined her with jealous criticism. Yes, she was beautiful—beautiful enough to steal the heart out of a man and then to laugh at him for his folly. Among the many faces there was none so fair as hers.

Was Felix watching her, too, from some corner of the great square, and would he come presently to pour out his confidences—rhapsodies, the same old raptures in praise of a new goddess? Malleson wondered suddenly why he had journied to Venice. Was it only to find out that Philippa was more beautiful than ever?

While he stood, she turned her head slowly, and he knew that she saw and recognized him.

The colour, always so quick to come with every light emotion, rose under her fair transparent skin; her very throat seemed to crimson. She hesitated just an instant; perhaps the scarcely-veiled contempt in his eyes frightened her. Then she got up and came to him. She held out her hand, but he did not take it, and she let it drop suddenly at her side.

"I expected you," she said.

"You wanted me to be a witness of your triumph?" He could not help the sneer.

"Then you have heard?" She looked at him with a sort of proud surprise overcoming her shame.

"I have heard nothing; but I am prepared not to be astonished. I have come a long way to hear your news—haven't I?"

"To congratulate me, or some one else on his escape, perhaps?" she said. "Don't trouble to explain; I know why you came."

"Then I may as well return."

She gave a little impatient movement.

"We can't talk here," she said, turning away and making him a sign to follow her.

He obeyed, not understanding this new mood. He had expected to be met with blushes, laughter, perhaps a little ashamed feeling, and he noticed that the crowd parted before this regal maiden, who bore herself with strange

haughtiness. He had a mind to turn and go, but he followed her.

She parted the heavy leather curtain, and entered the cathedral. Here, after the golden light of the piazza, the shadows seemed to fall thick. The air was faint with incense, the great candles burned feebly on the altar, and the glory of the mosaics was hidden. Everybody was out on the square. The music reached them now and again, invading the silence of the dim church.

"You can't scold me here," she said with a little smile, in which the old Philippa peeped out.

"I have no wish to scold you," he said coldly.

"I am too insignificant even for your anger."

"This is all beside the point. Where is he?" he asked. He was growing every moment more bewildered. He looked about him as if he expected Felix to emerge from behind one of the pillars and confront him. He made up his mind that he had come on a fool's errand, and that the more quickly he went the better.

"Do you mean Felix Chester?"

He did not deign a reply, and she added quickly—

"I sent him away three days ago."

"You sent him away!" he exclaimed, roused at last to anger, "you taught him to be fickle

to the best emotion of his life, and then you tired of him and sent him away! Oh, you women, how cruel you can be!"

"He never even paid me the poor compliment of pretending to like my society," she said proudly. "He hasn't been such a delightful companion all these months. It was not for my sake he stayed," she added, with bitter frankness.

"And yet, knowing what you did, you let him stay!"

"How was I to hinder him living where he chose?" she begun impetuously, and then she hesitated. "There were some things that, if I had known them, might have made a difference. But I did not know."

"You did not wish to know," he corrected her quietly.

"Well, then, I did not wish to know, if you will have it so."

Her eyes fell before his; he seemed able to read her very soul.

"Was it such a wonder that I did not care to court shame and disgrace ——"

"Be good enough to tell me about Felix," he said curtly. "Where can I find him?"

"I told you he had left Venice."

She suffered keenly; perhaps for the first time in her life she fully understood in all its clearness the contempt of an honourable, truth-

loving nature for what is mean and base. His calm ignoring of her suffering scorched her like a hot breath.

"You were always hard and unjust to me," she said, stung to momentary passion.

"How could I be other than hard?" he answered her quietly. "Think of it—you have embittered two lives—you have inflicted sorrow on the gentlest heart in the world; you have been false to friendship. A word from you might have hindered it all, but your wounded pride and vanity suffered and you kept silence. This is how you have repaid her love and trust; and you tell me I am unjust to you!"

Her head drooped on her breast, her cheek blanched. All her gay, careless life had not held a moment like this. In those few words, spoken so quietly, she saw, as it were, her own soul laid bare. She stood at last face to face with the naked, unvarnished truth; her poor pretences, her flimsy excuses stripped away. He never knew how much she suffered in that brief minute of time; but there was some seed of nobleness in her after all, on which he had not calculated. It sprang up now in response to his words.

"I deserve it all," she said; "it is all true." Then, in her need of the relief of confession, she hurried on. "Nothing that you say or think

is too bad for me. Perhaps if I had had some one like you near me when I was young I might have been different. I do not know, and it does not matter now——"

"Tell me nothing more; except where I may find him," he said, quick to be generous too.

"No. I will tell you everything now. I guessed that mamma knew something about Mr. Ouvry, and that she used her knowledge to send Di away—out of England. I do not defend her, but it was for my sake—my supposed happiness she did it. I did not seek to know what it was; I might have been told if I had asked, but I did not ask. I wished to keep clear of it all. One day I met Di, and she told me she was leaving England. She told me where she was going; I was the only one who knew. Miss Fullarton, for some reason of her own, played into my hands; she made a mystery of their journey and their destination, and when Mr. Chester came back they had vanished."

"And you kept silence," said Malleson. He was leaning against a pillar with folded arms, listening quietly.

"I did not tell him. One day I meant to do it, but he was cold and bitter, and I shut my mouth. He was often very rude," she said, with a faint gleam of a smile; "and I was

angry. It made me angry to see how forbearing and kind mamma was, and how she bore with all his crossness, and I would not help him. After we came to Italy, he made no effort to find Di out. He knew, I dare say, as we all did, that she had gone back to her father; but he never spoke of returning to Madrid. He had come to believe that he was mistaken—that she never cared for him. He told me once of a letter you had written to him, and he said that, after all, you might be right."

"I believed at the time what I wrote," he said quickly, feeling that he, too, had not been wholly blameless. "I have since had reason to know that I was mistaken."

"I knew all along that he was wronging her," said Philippa, still with that strange, calm frankness with which she had made the rest of her confession. "I am showing you my whole self now—am I not? I knew that he would never let any stain on her father's name stand between him and his love; but he had made me suffer some things, and that was how I punished him. One day, not long ago, mamma let drop something—a mere hint—and then, with a question or two, it all came out. I can hardly tell you what changed me. I think it was the thought of you," she said, with a shade of bitterness; "and the certainty that you would

one day find me out; but I went straight to him and told him."

"You told him everything?"

"I spared mamma where I could—" her cheeks burned hot with sudden shame—"but he knows it all. He is better than I took him to be. He was very gentle and forbearing. I think these months have made a man of him. He is almost good enough for Di."

"Thank heaven, we have got to the truth at last!" said Malleson, rousing himself with a great sigh. He was not thinking of her. She looked at him for a moment with strange wistfulness.

"Tell me one thing," she said. "It is not too late?"

"No, it is not too late."

"And she will not let any—any scruple come between them?"

"They love each other. They have done nothing dishonourable; they have borne their share of others sins, and now—who shall forbid them to be happy?"

He spoke half absently, and he looked weary and worn. He was visited by a great depression. He had nerved himself for a struggle, and the battle had been fought and won without him; not even the poor pleasure of restoring with his own hand her lost happiness

had been left him to do for Di. It was done, and he could but stand aside and look on.

"And you—what are you going to do?" he said suddenly, remembering her and looking at her with something like compunction. She, too, had staked her all and had lost; in this, at least, they were alike. He was angry no longer. Who would take a hammer to crush a butterfly?

"Who—I?" she said listlessly. "Oh, I am going to be married."

"Going to be married!" he echoed. He thought he had come to an end of all surprises, and here was a new and astonishing turn given to affairs.

"Yes. Is that so surprising? It is the goal I have been taught to look to all my life, since I left the nursery. There is some one who is willing to take me in spite of all that people are kind enough to say against me."

He took a step forward; he looked at her earnestly. Even so poor and weak a creature was worth saving, if he could save her.

"You are not doing this thing because of the idle tattle of——"

"I am doing it for a great many reasons."

"There is only one reason that can justify such a step."

"Ah, to you, perhaps. But I am not like you."

"Don't deceive yourself," he said. "Don't make a further tangle of your life. There can never be any good ground for that."

"I told you I was doing it for a great many reasons"—she coloured and hesitated—"and just a little, perhaps, for love. You know it does not take very much to make me happy." It seemed as if in his presence she was compelled to recognize the limitations of her nature. "You need not be afraid for me, though I thank you that you still care enough to warn me."

"And who is the happy man?" he asked coolly. He thought he saw now through the mystery of Felix's dismissal (though in this he wronged her), and his little spring of interest died out. Truly, it was easy to be just and to make amends when it cost nothing.

"If you had not been in such a hurry to crush me, you might have seen him with mamma at the café."

She spoke with something like the old ease and lightness. True to her nature, she fled instinctively from things unpleasant. She longed to forget the past hour, and, if possible, to make him forget it too.

"Mamma likes him very much. They were fixing on the furniture when I left—it's a subject they are fond of discussing."

"I did not see your mother."

"I know that; you only saw me. I felt your look burning me, and I knew that my hour had come."

"When is it to be?" He could not imitate her lightness.

"My marriage? Oh, one of these days, very soon; men are impatient creatures. He is older than I am, which everybody says is an excellent arrangement. He is very good," she said more gently; "too good for me, and he has wisdom enough for us both." She was silent a moment, then she added, with a visible effort, "I have told him everything."

"It is best to begin with the truth."

He was marvelling inwardly how this new aspirant had borne the history. In spite of the proof she had just given him, he was inclined to doubt the honesty or the fulness of the confession.

"Di will be very glad to hear of your happiness," he said calmly. "Have you any message to send her?"

She shook her head.

"I don't deserve to send her any. Tell her to remember me sometimes—as I used to be. And you will give her this for me?" She took off her glove and drew a slender silver ring from her finger. "Mr. Chester gave it to me

that day of the fair, but I know he did not buy it for me."

He took it in silence. Was he always to be the messenger of another, always to plead some other cause rather than his own? Then he remembered that, though trains will not hasten even for the most ardent of lovers, Felix would reach Madrid long before him.

"I'll take care of it," he said, slipping it into his waistcoat pocket.

While they talked with hushed voices one or two people had come in. A priest was busy at the distant altar; lights sprang up, and gleams of gold and of rich colour flashed into life from the walls.

"I must go," said Philippa. "They will have furnished all the reception rooms by this time, and will begin to miss me."

"I will take you back to the café."

"Will you come and see mamma?"

"No," he said quickly. He felt that this was more than he could endure. "You must excuse me; I am leaving Venice at once."

"You return so soon?"

"I must go back to my work."

"And to Di;" she will not be content till you have shared her happiness. She has been well off in some of her friendships."

"Good fortune has come to you, too, it would

seem," he said, with a smile. After all he could not part unkindly from her. He was never likely to see her again, and he remembered many pleasant hours with her in old days when he had believed her to be artless and simple; many a smile at her bright audacity, many a moment when her beauty and her charms had pleased him well. For these past favours he was ready to cry quits with her now.

"With my 'Soldier of fortune.' Did I tell you he is a soldier?"

"And a conqueror or conquered—which is it?"

"I suppose it is I who am a little the slave this time." She lifted her eyebrows with a whimsical look. "It's a punishment for all my sins, I suppose. Good-bye," she said, and this time he did not refuse her hand. "You have been very good to me. I shall never forget it."

He never had known, he never would know, how much she had always wished to stand well in his esteem. Her April face was grave for the moment; but he carried away the impression of a brilliant smile.

"She always took life easily," he thought to himself; and for the duration of a breath he felt inclined to envy her. Life was not easy then for him.

He had gone with her till within a few paces

of the place where her friends sat. Glancing over the heads of the crowd, he saw Mrs. Henshaw's nodding purple feathers adding emphasis to her speech. The ice was melting on her plate; she was tapping with her fan the arm of her companion. He was not destined even to catch a glimpse of the estimable military gentleman who was Philippa's conqueror; the lady's flounces hid him effectually. Now she turned and saw her daughter; and instinctively he fled, not pausing till he had put the length of the piazza between them.

He wandered aimlessly through the narrow, crowded streets of the city, dark and unsavoury at the best of times; the people jostled him, for he paid little heed to the rules of the road. He was marvelling over that old subject on which our philosophers have thrown little light—the various fates that are dealt out to each of us, not surely according to our deserts. Here was a lady, here were two ladies—mother and child—who had not aspired to any clear heights of morality; who had, to speak the plain truth, done many a mean, ignoble, unworthy deed, yet fortune had showered good things on them, and made their path plain.

He thought of Philippa sailing her galley on fair seas unruffled by any storm, reaching prosperously the haven of her desires, and—yes, in

spite of that one glimpse into her soul—thinking it but her due that life should smile on her.

Did he envy her now? Here, in Venice, of all places, he might surely have been allowed to make his moan and bewail his hard lot; yet I question if, after that one short regret, he would have changed places with the happiest and most prosperous man in the sea-city.

"Entsagen," "entbehren"—there is sweetness to be wrung even out of that bitter cup.

By-and-by, without intending it, he came out upon a quay where the gondoliers wait to be hired, and a wayward fancy to reach the silence of the distant lagoons took hold of him. He stepped into a boat, and gave the order to go out to where the waters broaden into a sea, and Venice is lost in the distance.

"Go on," he cried, impatient to leave all life and sound behind, and the boatman obeyed. It was but another freak of an eccentric Britain; and the Britains, it is well known, pay handsomely.

They were far enough away at last. Venice was wrapped in a soft haze, which its lights hardly penetrated. The night was grey and mild, and everything seemed to sleep; the brooding sky hung like a curtain over the earth; there was drowsiness in the lap of the water

against the boat, and the very stars were too indolent to shine.

Quietness and peace came to him, too, at last. He lay and looked up at the bending grey sky. He had meant to do a great thing for Di, and it had all been done without him. Already, perhaps, she was happy with her lover, and he was going home to wish her joy. There was only one thing more he could do—the last for her. He could bury his own secret for ever, bury it a hundred fathoms deep, and be the friend they took him for.

He sat up suddenly, to the surprise of the gondolier, who thought that he slept, and who had entertained furtive plans of stealing homewards.

"Go back to Venice. Quick!" he cried.

CHAPTER XV.

"Après tant de jours; après tant de pleurs."

"Beautiful lady, I love you better than all the diamonds and all the riches of the world."

He knew he should get over it—put it behind him. In this life of ours death comes to us all many times; he had died before, and it had been harder then. Something had passed out of his existence; but other things were left—things that it might be worth one's while to live for. He even discovered with uneasy astonishment, and something like self-reproach, that his trouble did not exclude every other feeling. He noticed, for instance, that his room had not been brushed or dusted since he left it; and he felt it to be a great aggravation of his misery that he had come back with a heavy feverish cold.

This alternate shivering and burning made the work that was to be his solace impossible. He threw down his pen in disgust and resigned himself to idleness. It was hard usage; wasn't

it enough that he had effaced himself, taken to himself that hard doctrine of renunciation? Why should fate add a throbbing head to her other insults?

He sat cowering over the fire, thinking chiefly, it must be confessed, of his bodily ailments. One is not always on the heights; where is your philosopher who could endure the toothache patiently? A man with a cold or a headache is a terror to most households; and I question whether the happiest turn to his love affairs could console him at such a time, or make him deem himself other than an object of deep pity.

To this sufferer—one moment bemoaning his barren life, the next his burning head—there entered presently a beautiful young lady. Malleson, glancing up, thought it was but one more delusive dream, such as he had awaked from many times when he had pictured Di presiding here; transforming the "outer court" into the "inner sanctuary," the dusty, shabby room into home.

"Why do you come?" he said half aloud. "You do not belong to me any more."

"May I come in, Ralph?" said the real Di, coming forward, not waiting for permission. "I have brought Concha. We heard that you had come back, and I wanted to——"

What was it? To thank him? to share some good news with him?

"Oh, but you are ill, surely!" she broke off abruptly.

"Just ill enough to be glad to forget it, and to thank you for coming to cheer me."

"Anchel said nothing about that—did he, Concha? He only told us you had come back."

"He thinks there are no bones ache but his own," said the old woman, seating herself heavily.

"He reserves for himself the privilege of grumbling," said Malleson, jumping up and dragging forward a chair for Di. "He thinks I ought to be gratified to be let off with a cold."

"He is a selfish old man; and you want somebody to scold you both," she said, looking at him with a serious air. "As for you, why did you run away from us all?"

She did not wait for his answer; there was a new soft light upon her face, and she was smiling instead of scolding.

The old serving woman had risen from her seat, and, placing her basket on the floor, she began to push about the furniture.

"A man's a poor creature at all times," she muttered; "and when he is ill—— Blessed

saints! he would let the world fall to pieces and never put out a finger to stop it. Will the señorita behold the condition of this room?"

"I'll help you," cried Di, springing up. "You may well talk, Concha. Was there ever such an untidy boy? The chairs look as if they had been dancing a reel; no wonder he has a headache."

Ralph lay back in his seat and watched her with a smile on his lips. He had been wretched and lonely, averse from work, tired of everything, and this sweet friend had come to cheer him. Could he not accept her friendship and be thankful for the boon?

"I suppose I mustn't touch the precious papers?" she was saying, looking with great respect at the disorderly writing-table. "The dust is sacred; but if you only knew how thick it is!"

"Sweep them all into the basket," he said, rising and helping her. "I'll begin afresh—another day. It is time for a new beginning."

"All that wisdom lost to the world!" she said with dismay, as he crushed the manuscript ruthlessly between his hands.

"Don't be sarcastic," he retorted; "you may leave that to me. A man with a cold has a good ground of quarrel with the world."

"The world is beautiful," she answered, turning away. "Wky should you quarrel with it? Don't you know that the spring has come?"

"Your spring—yes."

Perhaps she did not hear him. She was looking out of the window. The house was in welcome shadow, but the opposite pavement was barred with sunshine. The old earth had revived, and was gay and wanton in its youth, for spring, as she had said, was at hand.

Concha, with much show of zeal, was producing order out of chaos, impartially mingling addresses to the blessed saints with maledictions on Anchel's rheumatic bones. The others did not speak, and Ralph, looking up, saw that Di had forgotten him.

She roused herself presently and came behind him, putting a hand on the back of his chair.

"Why did you go away, Ralph?" she said, speaking very low.

"Why did I go?" he repeated. "In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of travel. I think it was to bring you a message from a young lady."

"Tell me," she said urgently. "You went to Venice?"

"To Venice—yes. But Prince Alasnam had set out on a journey days before, so the envoy had to take himself home again."

"You brought a message—from Philippa," she faltered.

"This," he said, and he held up the ring. She was still hidden behind him, and she put out her hand and took it silently.

"Tell me about her," she whispered by-and-by.

"She is going to be married," said Ralph, smiling oddly to himself. "I think we may believe it this time. Mrs. Henshaw was arrayed in the purple plumes and she had on a new gown, and if ever a gown expressed triumph in every line and fold of it, that one did."

"She is married by this time," Di said in a low voice. "It was to be yesterday."

"So? Wise man to brook no delay!"

"I got another message." Her heart was swelling, she could hardly speak. He had gone then to Venice—all this long way for her!

"I know, and I think I can guess who the messenger was," he said calmly, helping her.

"Was it wrong to listen? Tell me, Ralph. I don't know if I was right, but it seemed to me it might be still more wrong to——"

"To play the maiden of fiction and make

everybody wretched with your heroics? Nay, my dear, we have martyrs enough without your taking up the *rôle*. It would suit you but ill, besides."

"I could give up, too, if it were best," she said, with a touch of pain.

"And turn Prince Alasnam over to me? Thank you, but I've had enough of the young man; I wash my hands of him from to-day. Did he never bring you a message from me?"

"I went away. What was it, Ralph?"

"It would seem it is not needed now." He smiled. "Your instinct and my logic have arrived at the same conclusion, Di. We are both foolish creatures; and Prince Alasnam, who has done nothing to deserve it, has got the better of us both."

"If I thought you were pleased——" she began, much moved.

"Pleased!" he said, and he smiled once more. "Am I never again to be privileged with a sight of your face, Miss Di? What have I done that you should persistently address all your remarks to the back of my head? Come here, and let me look at you."

She came round at that and knelt down beside him.

Concha, thumping the sofa cushions with savage energy, looked at her young mistress in amazement. Was it not enough that one young gentleman should spend all his waking hours in the Preciados; must the señorita run after this old and ugly Mr. Malleson too? It was well she had faithful Concha to trudge behind her, and not that feather-brained Pepa, who was, doubtless, at this moment, lolling over the balcony, while the puchero was burnt to a cinder.

"Señorita," she cried, as she conjured up this mental picture, "it is time to go home. Don Carlos will be impatient for his coffee."

But Deonys waved her away with an impatient movement of her hand. Even the father was forgotten at that moment. She looked up at Ralph with appealing eyes, the colour coming and going with every breath:

"Oh, Ralph," she said, "you have always been the dearest friend and brother to him and to me; what should we both have done without you? And you are a little bit glad, aren't you—not very sorry, at least? Indeed, I couldn't help it——"

"God bless you, Di," he said very gently, laying his hand for an instant on her bent head. "Don't you know, child, I've always thought of

your happiness first?" He could say it honestly now.

"He is too good for me, I know." She had turned away her face and was looking absently in front of her; already her thoughts had gone back to her lover. There was a proud smile on her lips. "He is too good for me, but——"

"But I shouldn't tell him that, I think. Most likely he'll believe it; there's no limit to the conceit of some young fellows. Wholesome snubbing is what I should recommend."

"I shouldn't know how to begin," she answered, laughing in her happiness. She was no longer afraid that he might think her unworthy of so great a prize.

"Not after practising on me all these years?"

"Did I snub you?" she said, taking the accusation very lightly. "But then you never thought so much of me. He puts me on a pedestal; some day I shall come tumbling down, and then he will be dreadfully disappointed."

"Prince Alasnam has found the lady who is better than diamonds," said Malleson half to himself. "The riddle of the white satin is read; the ninth statute has been discovered at last."

"What nonsense you are talking, you silly

boy!" she said, jumping up and tying on her hat. "Yes, Concha, I am coming. Better than diamonds! If you talk to him like that, I'll forbid him to come to you. And why, if you please, do you always call him Prince Alasnam? His own name is prettier." She blushed rosily.

"Ask him," said Malleson, dragging his chair nearer the fire. "If he doesn't know, tell him from me to read the story and lay it to heart."

"He is coming to see you," she said, pausing at the door. "I think you had better tell him yourself."

"So he is coming to see me! Does he want my opinion too?"

"He would have come with me, but I wanted to tell you first. We are all coming every day—the padre too, and Concha with her duster—till you get well again."

"What a threat!" he said, with a shudder. "If anything could cure a man surely that would."

But he sent her away with a smile, and only grew grave again when the sound of her light, quick footsteps had died off upon the stair.

"I've done it," he said to himself, with a kind of grim humour; "and she never suspects. Ralph Malleson, what an actor the world has

lost in you! Now for the boy!" He drew himself together and took a great breath. "It won't be so bad the next time, and the time after less bad still, and finally not bad at all. It's the first step that costs."

Almost while he thought aloud Felix came flying up the stairs, but stopped half-way to greet a lady who was coming down.

"I'm late," he said with the voice of compunction; "but it was your father who kept me. It was business, dear one, about our home. He is glad we should settle in England; and some day, he says, he will come to us there——"

"In England? Ah, yes, you will tell me all about that another time. And now, won't you go to Ralph? He is ill, and a little lonely." She looked at him appealingly. "It seems hard that we should have all the happiness," she said.

"I'll go to him. You will wait for me just five minutes more? I can hardly believe in my good fortune till I've shared it with him, dear old man."

She sent away Concha—whose patience was worn to a thread—and waited for him alone. There was a wide window with a low, broad sill, on which she seated herself. No one came or went to disturb her silence; but outside there

was life and movement of passing crowds made happy by the new birth of the world. Another king had come to the land, and the troubles of a year ago were already all forgotten. Di looked out and smiled gravely to herself. After some days of wintry darkness her spring had come back too. Henceforward she also was to walk under bright skies, with a glad heart among her fellows, helping where she could; remembering to spare out of her undeserved store something for another's need. She turned the silver ring thoughtfully on her finger. It was a token of ended estrangement—ended pain; now at last she was at peace with all the world.

By-and-by Felix came and sat beside her. He was quieter, and his mobile face graver than it often was. He took her two hands in his own before he spoke. Then suddenly he said impetuously—

"What a good fellow he is—the best fellow in the world! And I used to be such a little brute to him long ago!"

She looked up at him and smiled.

"Is that what you were thinking of? Ralph was always the dearest of friends. He thinks so much about others, and what will make them happy. He never thinks of himself at all. That is what we must try to do."

"I've always been horribly selfish, I'm afraid, but now——" he looked into her clear, steadfast eyes—"but now you will help me?"

"We will help each other," she said as she rose.

They went slowly downwards, and Ralph, standing at his high window saw them pass out into the sunshine.

THE END.

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